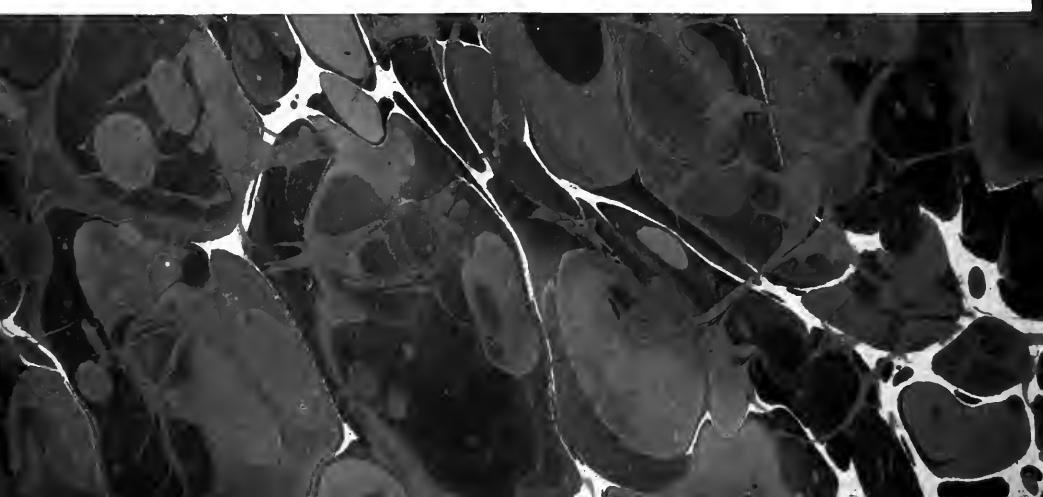
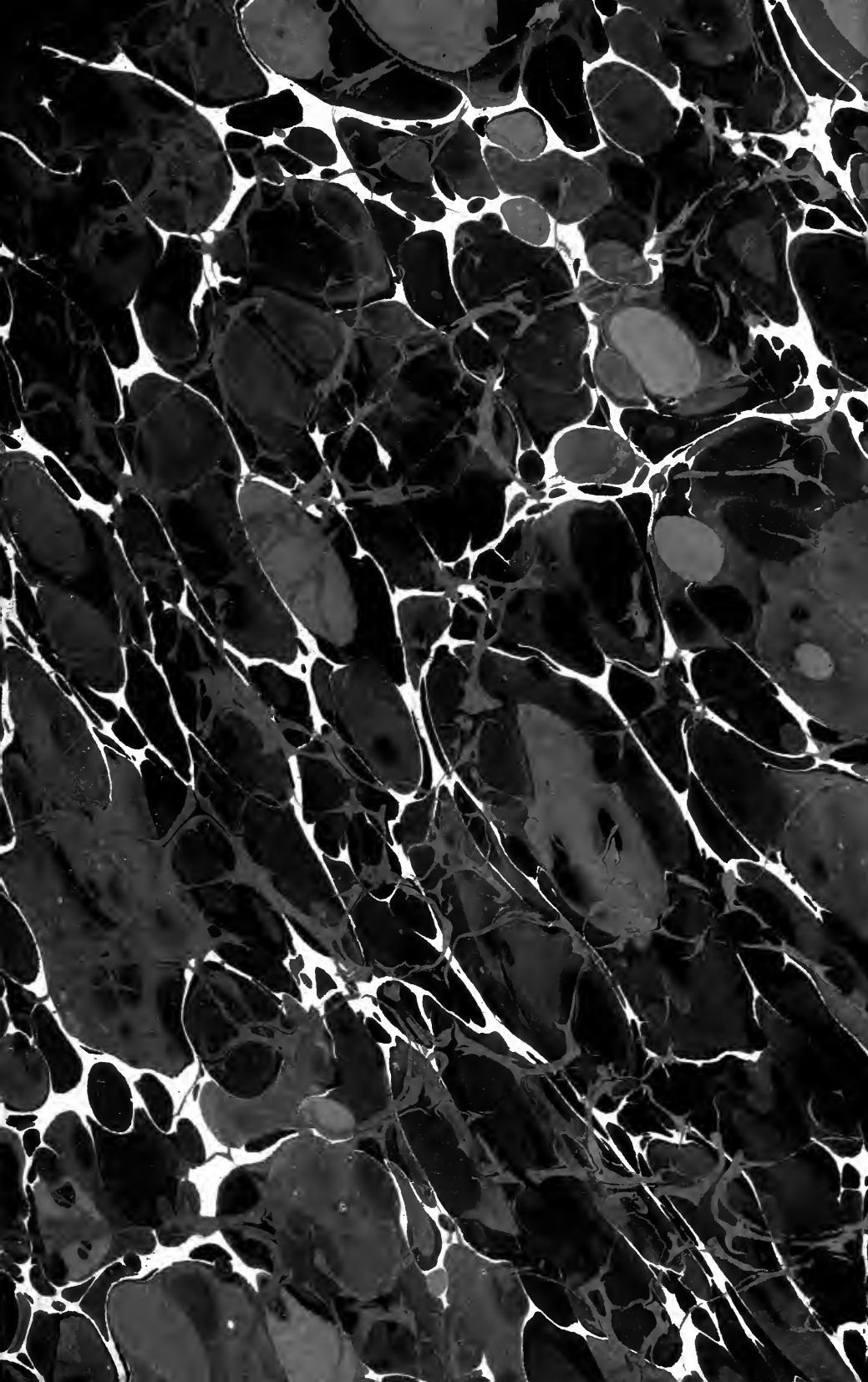
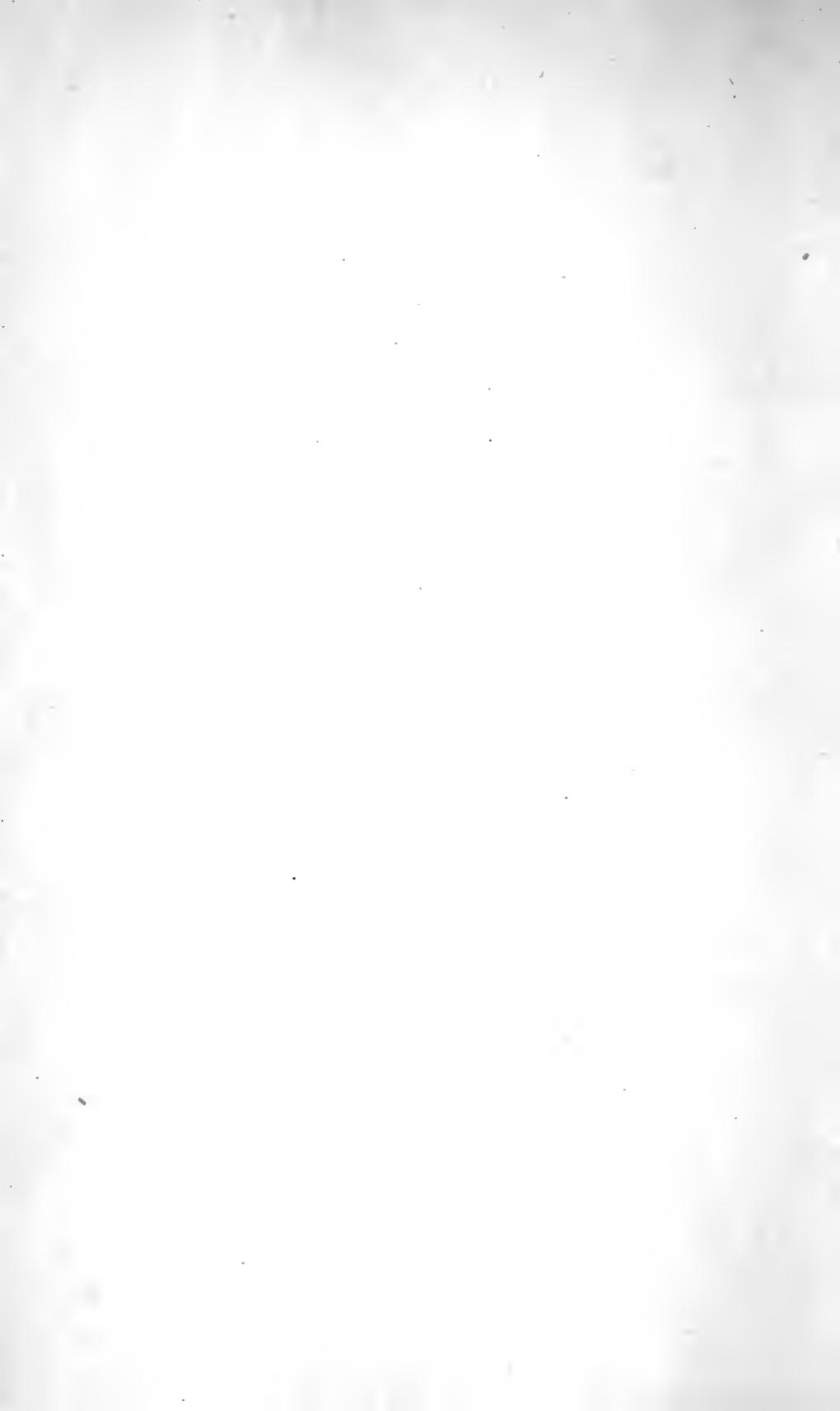


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RHODA FLEMING.

VOL. II.



RHODA FLEMING.

A Story.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

“THE ORDEAL OF RICHARD FEVEREL,” “EVAN HARRINGTON,” ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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RHODA FLEMING.

CHAPTER I.

ROBERT SMITTEN LOW.

THE night was warm with the new-fallen snow, though the stars sparkled coldly. A fleet of south-westerly rain-clouds had been met in mid-sky by a sharp puff from due north, and the moisture had descended like a woven shroud, covering all the land, the house-tops, and the trees.

Young Harry Boulby was at sea, and this still weather was just what a mother's heart wished for him. The widow looked through her bedroom window and listened, as if the absolute stillness must beget a sudden cry. The thought of her boy made her heart revert to Robert. She was thinking of Robert when the muffled sound of a horse at speed caused her to look up the

street, and she saw one coming—a horse without a rider. The next minute he was out of sight.

Mrs. Boulby stood terrified. The silence of the night hanging everywhere seemed to call on her for proof that she had beheld a real earthly spectacle, and the dead thump of the hooves on the snow-floor in passing struck a chill through her as being phantom-like. But she had seen a saddle on the horse, and the stirrups flying, and the horse looked affrighted. The scene was too earthly in its suggestion of a tale of blood. What if the horse were Robert's? She tried to laugh at her womanly fearfulness, and had almost to suppress a scream in doing so. There was no help for it but to believe her brandy as good and efficacious as her guests did, so she went downstairs and took a fortifying draught; after which her blood travelled faster, and the event galloped swiftly into the recesses of time, and she slept.

While the morning was still black, and the streets without a sign of life, she was aroused by a dream of some one knocking at her grave-stone. "Ah, that brandy!" she sighed. "This is what a poor woman has to pay for custom!" Which

we may interpret as the remorseful morning confession of a guilt she had been the victim of over night. She knew that good brandy did not give bad dreams, and was self-convicted. Strange were her sensations when the knocking continued ; and presently she heard a voice in the naked street below call in a moan, “ Mother !”

“ My darling !” she answered, divided in her guess at its being Harry or Robert.

A glance from the open window showed Robert leaning in the quaint old porch, with his head bound by a handkerchief ; but he had no strength to reply to a question at that distance, and when she let him in he made two steps and dropped forward on the floor.

Lying there, he plucked at her skirts. She was shouting for help, but with her ready apprehension of the pride in his character, she knew what was meant by his broken whisper before she put her ear to his lips, and she was silent, miserable sight as was his feeble efforts to rise on an elbow that would not straighten.

His head was streaming with blood, and the stain was on his neck and chest. He had one

helpless arm ; his clothes were torn as from a fierce struggle.

“ I’m quite sensible,” he kept repeating, lest she should relapse into screams.

“ Lord love you for your spirit !” exclaimed the widow, and there they remained, he like a winged eagle, striving to raise himself from time to time, and fighting with his desperate weakness. His face was to the ground ; after a while he was still. In alarm the widow stooped over him : she feared that he had given up his last breath ; but the candle-light showed him shaken by a sob, as it seemed to her, though she could scarce believe it of this manly fellow. Yet it proved true ; she saw the very tears. He was crying at his helplessness.

“ Oh, my darling boy !” she burst out ; “ what have they done to ye ? the cowards they are ! but do now have pity on a woman, and let me get some creature to lift you to a bed, dear. And don’t flap at me with your hand like a bird that’s shot. You’re quite, quite sensible, I know ; quite sensible, dear ; but for my sake, Robert, my Harry’s good friend, only for my sake, let your-

self be a carried to a clean, nice bed, till I get Dr. Bean to you. Do, do."

Her entreaties brought on a succession of the efforts to rise, and at last, getting round on his back, and being assisted by the widow, he sat up against the wall. The change of posture stupified him with a dizziness. He tried to utter the old phrase, that he was sensible, but his hand beat at his forehead before the words could be shaped.

"What pride is, when it's a man!" the widow thought, as he recommenced the grievous struggle to rise on his feet; now feeling them up to the knee with a questioning hand, and pausing as if in a reflective wonder, and then planting them for a spring that failed wretchedly; groaning and leaning backward, lost in a fit of despair, and again beginning, patient as an insect imprisoned in a circle.

The widow bore with his man's pride, until her nerves became afflicted by the character of his movements, which, as her sensations conceived them, were like those of a dry door jarring loose. She caught him in her arms: "It's let my back break, but you shan't fret to death there, under

my eyes, proud or humble, poor dear," she said, and with a great pull she got him upright. He fell across her shoulder with so stiff a groan that for a moment she thought she had done him mortal injury.

"Good old mother," he said, boyishly, to reassure her.

"Yes ; and you'll behave to me like a son," she coaxed.

They talked as by slow degrees the stairs were ascended.

"A crack o' the head, mother—a crack o' the head," said he.

"Was it the horse, my dear?"

"A crack o' the head, mother."

"What have they done to my boy Robert?"

"They've,"—he swung about humorously, weak as he was and throbbing with pain—"they've let out some of your brandy, mother got into my head."

"Who've done it, my dear?"

"They've done it, mother."

"Oh, take care o' that nail at your foot ; and oh, that beam to your poor poll—poor soul ! he's

been and hurt himself again.—And did they do it to him ? and what was it for ?” she resumed in soft cajolery.

“ They did it, because——”

“ Yes, my dear ; the reason for it ?”

“ Because, mother, they had a turn that way.”

“ Thanks be to Above for leaving your cunning in you, my dear,” said the baffled woman, with sincere admiration. “ And Lord be thanked, if you’re not hurt bad, that they haven’t spoilt his handsome face,” she added.

In the bedroom, he let her partially undress him, refusing all doctor’s aid, and commanding her to make no noise about him ; and then he lay down and shut his eyes, for the pain was terrible —galloped him and threw him with a shock—and galloped him and threw him again, whenever his thoughts got free for a moment from the dizzy aching.

“ My dear,” she whispered, “ I’m going to get a little brandy.”

She hastened away upon this mission.

He was in the same posture when she returned with bottle and glass.

She poured out some, and made much of it as a specific, and of the great things brandy would do; but he motioned his hand from it feebly, till she reproached him tenderly as perverse and unkind.

“Now, my dearest boy, for my sake—only for my sake. Will you? Yes, you will, my Robert!”

“No brandy, mother.”

“Only one small thimbleful?”

“No more brandy for me!”

“See, dear, how seriously you take it, and all because you want the comfort.”

“No brandy,” was all he could say.

She looked at the label on the bottle. Alas! she knew whence it came, and what its quality. She could cheat herself about it when herself only was concerned—but she wavered at the thought of forcing it upon Robert as trusty medicine, though it had a pleasant taste, and was really, as she conceived, good enough for customers.

She tried him faintly with arguments in its favour; but his resolution was manifested by a deaf ear.

Had she had perfect faith in it she would, and she was conscious that she could, have raised his head and poured it down his throat. The crucial test of her love for Robert forbade the attempt. She burst into an uncontrollable fit of crying.

"Halloa! mother," said Robert, opening his eyes to the sad candlelight surrounding them.

"My darling boy! whom I do love so; and not to be able to help you! What shall I do—what shall I do!"

With a start, he cried, "Where's the horse?"

"The horse?"

"The old dad 'll be asking for the horse to-morrow."

"I saw a horse, my dear, afore I turned to my prayers at my bedside, coming down the street without his rider. He came like a rumble of deafness in my ears. Oh, my boy, I thought, Is it Robert's horse?—knowing you've got enemies, as there's no brave man has not got

'em—which is our only hope in the God of Heaven!"

"Mother, punch my ribs."

He stretched himself flat for the operation, and shut his mouth.

"Hard, mother!—and quick!—I can't hold out long."

"Oh! Robert," moaned the petrified woman—"strike you?"

"Straight in the ribs. Shut your fist and do it—quick."

"My dear!—my boy!—I haven't the heart to it!"

"Ah!" Robert's chest dropped in; but tightening his muscles again, he said, "now do it—do it!"

"Oh! a poke at a poor fire puts it out, dear. And make a murderer of me, you call mother! Oh! as I love the name, I'll obey you, Robert. But!—there!"

"Harder, mother."

"There!—goodness forgive me!"

"Hard as you can—all's right."

"There!—and there!—oh!—mercy!"

"Press in at my stomach."

She nerved herself to do his bidding, and, following his orders, took his head in her hands and felt about it. The anguish of the touch wrung a stifled scream from him, at which she screamed responsive. He laughed, while twisting with the pain.

"You cruel boy, to laugh at your mother," she said, delighted by the sound of safety in that sweet human laughter. "Hey! don't ye shake your brain; it ought to lie quiet. And here's the spot of the wicked blow—and him in love—as I know he is! What would she say if she saw him now? But an old woman's the best nurse—ne'er a doubt of it."

She felt him heavy on her arm, and knew that he had fainted. Quelling her first impulse to scream, she dropped him gently on the pillow, and rapped to rouse up her maid.

The two soon produced a fire and hot water, bandages, vinegar in a basin, and every crude appliance that could be thought of, the maid following her mistress's directions with a con-

soling awe, for Mrs. Boulby had told her no more than that a man was hurt.

"I do hope, if it's anybody, it's that ther' Moody," said the maid.

"A pretty sort of a Christian you think yourself, I dare say," Mrs. Boulby replied.

"Christian or not, onc can't help longin' for a choice, mum. We ain't all hands and knees."

"Better for you if you was," said the widow. "It's tongues, you're to remember, you're not to be. Now come you up after me—and you'll not utter a word. You'll stand behind the door to do what I tell you. You're a soldier's daughter, Susan, and haven't a claim to be excitable."

"My mother was given to faints," Susan protested on behalf of her possible weakness.

"You may peep." Thus Mrs. Boulby tossed a sop to her frail woman's nature.

But for her having been appeased by the sagacious accordance of this privilege, the maid would never have endured to hear Robert's voice

in agony, and to imagine that it was Robert, the beloved of Warbeach, who had come to harm. Her apprehensions not being so lively as her mistress's, by reason of her love being smaller, she was more terrified than comforted by Robert's jokes during the process of washing off the blood, cutting the hair from the wound, bandaging and binding up the head.

His levity seemed ghastly ; and his refusal upon any persuasion to see a doctor quite heathenish, and a sign of one foredoomed.

She believed that his arm was broken, and smarted with wrath at her mistress for so easily taking his word to the contrary. More than all, his abjuration of brandy now when it would do him good to take it, struck her as an instance of that masculine insanity in the comprehension of which all women must learn to fortify themselves. There was much whispering in the room, inarticulate to her, before Mrs. Boulby came out, enjoining a rigorous silence, and stating that the patient would drink nothing but tea.

" He begged," she said half to herself, " to

have the window blinds up in the morning, if the sun wasn't strong, for him to look on our river opening down to the ships."

"That looks as if he meant to live," Susan remarked.

"He!" cried the widow; "it's Robert Eccles. He'd stand on his last inch."

"Would he, now!" ejaculated Susan, marvelling at him, with no question as to what footing that might be.

"Leastways," the widow hastened to add, "if he thought it was only devils against him. I've heard him say, 'It's a fool that holds out against God, and a coward as gives in to the devil;' and there's my Robert painted by his own hand."

"But don't that bring him to this so often, Mum?" Susan ruefully inquired, joining tea-pot and kettle.

"I 'do believe he's protected," said the widow.

With the first morning light Mrs. Boulby was down at Warbeach Farm, and being directed to Farmer Eccles in the stables, she found the sturdy yeoman himself engaged in grooming Robert's horse.

"Well, Missis," he said, nodding to her ; "you win, you see. I thought you would ; I'd have sworn you would. Brandy's stronger than blood, with some of our young fellows."

"If you please, Mr. Eccles," she replied, "Robert's sending of me was to know if the horse was unhurt and safe."

"Won't his legs carry him yet, Missis?"

"His legs have been graciously spared, Mr. Eccles ; it's his head."

"That's where the liquor flies, I'm told."

"Pray, Mr. Eccles, believe me when I declare he hasn't touched a drop of anything but tea in my house this past night."

"I'm sorry for that ; I'd rather have him go to you. If he takes it, let him take it good ; and I'm given to understand that you've a reputation that way. Just tell him from me, he's at liberty to play the devil with himself, but not with my beasts."

The farmer continued his labour.

"No, you ain't a hard man, surely," cried the widow. "Not when I say he was sober, Mr. Eccles ; and was thrown, and made insensible?"

"Never knew such a thing to happen to him, Missis, and, what's more, I don't believe it. Mayhap you're come for his things: his Aunt Anne's indoors, and she'll give 'em up and gladly. And my compliments to Robert, and the next time he fancies visiting Warbeach, he'd best forward a letter to that effect."

Mrs. Boulby curtseyed humbly. "You think bad of me, Sir, for keeping a public; but I love your son as my own, and if I might presume to say so, Mr. Eccles, you will be proud of him too before you die. I know no more than you how he fell yesterday, but I do know he'd not been drinking, and have got bitter bad enemies."

"And that's not astonishing, Missis."

"No, Mr. Eccles; and a man who's brave besides being good soon learns that."

"Well spoken, Missis."

"Is Robert to hear he's denied his father's house?"

"I never said that, Mrs. Boulby. Here's my principle:—My house is open to my blood, so long as he don't bring downright disgrace on it, and then anyone may claim him that likes."

I won't give him money, because I know of a better use for it; and he shan't ride my beasts, because he don't know how to treat 'em. That's all."

"And so you keep within the line of your duty, Sir," the widow summed his speech.

"So I hope to," said the farmer.

"There's comfort in that," she replied.

"As much as there's needed," said he.

The widow curtseyed again. "It's not to trouble you, Sir, I called. Robert—thanks be to Above!—is not hurt serious, though severe."

"Where's he hurt?" the farmer asked rather hurriedly.

"In the head, it is."

"What have you come for?"

"First, his best hat."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed the farmer. "Well, if that'll mend his head it's at his service, I'm sure."

Sick at his heartlessness, the widow scattered emphasis over her concluding remarks. "First, his best hat, he wants; and his coat and clean shirt; and they mend the looks of a man, Mr.

Eccles ; and it's to look well is his object : for he's not one to make a moan of himself, and doctors may starve before he'd go to any of them. And my begging prayer to you is, that when you see your son, you'll not tell him I let you know his head or any part of him was hurt. I wish you good morning, Mr. Eccles."

" Good morning to you, Mrs. Boulby. You're a respectable woman."

" Not to be soaped," she murmured to herself in a heat.

The apparently medicinal articles of attire were obtained from Aunt Anne, without a word of speech on the part of that pale spinster. The deferential hostility between the two women acknowledged an intervening chasm. Aunt Anne produced a bundle, and placed the hat on it, upon which she had neatly pinned a tract, "The Drunkard's Awakening !" Mrs. Boulby glanced her eye in wrath across this superscription, thinking to herself, "Oh, you *good* people ! how you make us long in our hearts for trouble with you." She controlled the impulse, and mollified her spirit on her way home by distributing stray leaves of

the tract to the outlying heaps of rubbish, and to one inquisitive pig, who was looking up from a badly-smelling sty for what the heavens might send him.

She found Robert with his arm doubled over a basin, and Susan sponging cold water on it.

“No bones broken, mother!” he sung out. “I’m sound ; all right again. Six hours have done it this time. Is it a thaw? You needn’t tell me what the old dad has been saying. I shall be ready to breakfast in half an hour.”

“Lord, what a big arm it is!” exclaimed the widow. “And no wonder, or how would you be a terror to men? You naughty boy, to think of stirring! Here you’ll lie.”

“Ah, will I?” said Robert; and he gave a spring, and sat upright in the bed, rather white with the effort, which seemed to affect his mind, for he asked, dubiously, “What do I look like, mother?”

She brought him the looking-glass, and Susan being dismissed, he examined his features.

“Dear!” said the widow, sitting down on the

bed ; " it ain't much for me to guess you've got an appointment."

" At twelve o'clock, mother."

" With her ?" she uttered softly.

" It's with a lady, mother."

" And so many enemies prowling about, Robert, my dear ! Don't tell me they didn't fall upon you last night. I said nothing, but I'd swear it on the Book. Do you think you can go ?"

" Why mother, I go by my feelings, and there's no need to think at all, or God knows what I should think."

The widow shook her head. " Nothing 'll stop you, I suppose ?"

" Nothing inside of me will, mother."

" Doesn't she—— but never mind. I've no right to ask, Robert ; and if I have curiosity, it's about last night, and why you should let villains escape. But there's no accounting for a man's notions ; only, this I say, and I do say it, Nic Sedgett, he's at the bottom of any mischief brewed against you down here. And last night Stephen Bilton, or somebody, declared that Nic Sedgett had been seen up at Fairly."

“ Selling eggs, mother. Why shouldn’t he? We mustn’t complain of his getting an honest livelihood.”

“ He’s black-blooded, Robert; and I never can understand why the Lord did not make him a beast in face. I’m told that creature’s found pleasing by the girls.”

“ Ugh, mother, I’m not.”

“ She wont have you, Robert?”

He laughed. “ We shall see to-day.”

“ You deceiving boy!” cried the widow; “ and me not know it’s Mrs. Lovell you’re going to meet! and would to Heaven she’d see the worth of ye, for it’s a born lady you ought to marry.”

“ Just feel in my pockets, mother, and you wont be so ready with your talk of my marrying. And now I’ll get up. I feel as if my legs had to learn over again how to bear me. The old dad, bless his heart! gave me sound wind and limb to begin upon, so I’m not easily stumped, you see, though I’ve been near on it once or twice in my life.”

Mrs. Boulby murmured, “ Ah! are you still

going to be at war with those gentlemen, Robert?"

He looked at her steadily, while a shrewd smile wrought over his face, and then taking her hand, he said, "I'll tell you a little; you deserve it, and wont tattle. My curse is, I'm ashamed to talk about my feelings; but there's no shame in being fond of a girl, even if she refuses to have anything to say to you, is there? No, there isn't. I went with my dear old aunt's money to a farmer in Kent, and learnt farming; clear of the army first, by ——! But I must stop that burst of swearing. Half the time I've been away, I was there. The farmer's a good, sober, down-hearted man—a sort of beaten Englishman, who don't know it, tough, and always backing. He has two daughters: one went to London, and came to harm, of a kind. The other I'd prick this vein for and bleed to death, singing; and she hates me! I wish she did. She thought me such a good young man! I never drank; went to bed early, was up at work with the birds. Mr. Robert Armstrong! That changing of my

name was like a lead cap on my head. I was never myself with it, felt hang-dog—it was impossible a girl could care for such a fellow as I was. Mother, just listen : she's dark as a gipsy. She's the faithfulest, stoutest-hearted creature in the world. She has black hair, large brown eyes ; see her once ! She's my mate. I could say to her, ' Stand there ; take guard of a thing ;' and I could be dead certain of her—she'd perish at her post. Is the door locked ? Lock the door ; I wont be seen when I speak of her. Well, never mind whether she's handsome or not. She isn't a lady ; but she's my lady ; she's the woman I could be proud of. She sends me to the devil ! I believe a woman 'd fall in love with her cheeks, they are so round and soft and kindly coloured. Think me a fool ; I am. And here am I, away from her, and I feel that any day harm may come to her, and she'll melt, and be as if the devils of hell were mocking me. Who's to keep harm from her when I'm away ? What can I do but drink and forget ? Only now, when I wake up from it, I'm a crawling wretch at her feet. If I had her feet to kiss ! I've never

kissed her—never ! And no man has kissed her. Damn my head ! here's the ache coming on. That's my last oath, mother. I wish there was a Bible handy, but I'll try and stick to it without. My God ! when I think of her, I fancy everything on earth hangs still and doubts what's to happen. I'm like a wheel, and go on spinning. Feel my pulse now. Why is it I can't stop it ? But there she is, and I could crack up this old world to know what's coming. I was mild as milk all those days I was near her. My comfort is, she don't know me. And that's my curse too ! If she did, she'd know as clear as day I'm her mate, her match, the man for her. I am, by Heaven !—that's an oath permitted. To see the very soul I want, and to miss her ! I'm down here, mother ; she loves her sister, and I must learn where her sister's to be found. One of those gentlemen up at Fairly's the guilty man. I don't say which ; perhaps I don't know. But oh, what a lot of lightnings I see in the back of my head !”

Robert fell back on the pillow. Mrs. Boulby wiped her eyes. Her feelings were overwhelmed

with mournful devotion to the passionate young man ; and she expressed them practically : " A steak would never digest in his poor stomach ! "

He seemed to be of that opinion too, for when after lying till eleven, he rose and appeared at the breakfast-table, he ate nothing but crumbs of dry bread. It was curious to see his precise attention to the neatness of his hat and coat, and the nervous eye he cast upon the clock, while brushing and accurately fixing these garments. The hat would not sit as he was accustomed to have it, owing to the bruise on his head, and he stood like a woman petulant with her milliner before the glass ; now pressing the hat down till the pain was insufferable, and again trying whether it presented him acceptably in the enforced style of his wearing it. He persisted in this, till Mrs. Boulby's exclamation of wonder admonished him of the ideas received by other eyes than his own. When we appear most incongruous, we are often exposing the key to our characters ; and how much his vanity, wounded by Rhoda, had to do with his proceedings down at Warbeach, it were unfair to measure just yet, lest his finer

qualities be cast into shade, but to what degree it affected him will be seen.

Mrs. Boulby's persuasions induced him to take a stout, silver-topped walking-stick of her husband's, a relic shaped from the wood of the Royal George; leaning upon which rather more like a naval pensioner than he would have cared to know, he went forth to his appointment with the lady.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. LOVELL SHOWS A TAME BRUTE.

THE park-sward of Fairly, white with snow, rolled down in long sweeps to the salt water, and under the last sloping oak of the park, there was a gorse-bushed lane, green in summer, but now bearing cumbrous blossom-like burdens of the crisp snow-fall. Mrs. Lovell sat on horseback here, and alone, with her gauntleted hand at her waist, charmingly habited in tone with the landscape. She expected a cavalier, and did not perceive the approach of a pedestrian, but bowed quietly when Robert lifted his hat.

“They say you are mad. You see, I trust myself to you.”

“I wish I could thank you for your kindness, madam.”

“Are you ill?”

"I had a fall last night, madam."

The lady patted her horse's neck.

"I haven't time to inquire about it. You understand that I cannot give you more than a minute."

She glanced at her watch.

"Let us say five exactly. To begin : I can't affect to be ignorant of the business which brings you down here. I won't pretend to lecture you about the course you have taken ; but, let me distinctly assure you, that the gentleman you have chosen to attack in this extraordinary manner, has done no wrong to you or to anyone. It is, therefore, disgracefully unjust to single him out. You know he cannot possibly fight you. I speak plainly."

"Yes, madam," said Robert. "I'll answer plainly. He can't fight a man like me. I know it. I bear him no ill-will. I believe he's innocent enough in this matter, as far as acts go."

"That makes your behaviour to him worse!"

Robert looked up into her eyes.

"You are a lady. You won't be shocked at what I tell you."

“Yes, yes,” said Mrs. Lovell, hastily: “I have learnt—I am aware of the tale. Some one has been injured: or, you think so. I don’t accuse you of madness, but, good Heavens! what means have you been pursuing! Indeed, sir, let your feelings be as deeply engaged as possible, you have gone altogether the wrong way to work.”

“Not if I have got your help by it, madam.”

“Gallantly spoken.”

She smiled with a simple grace. The next moment she consulted her watch.

“Time has gone faster than I anticipated. I must leave you. Let this be our stipulation:”

She lowered her voice.

“You shall have the address you require. I will undertake to see her myself, when next I am in London. It will be soon. In return, sir, favour me with your word of honour not to molest this gentleman any further. Will you do that? You may trust me.”

“I do, madam, with all my soul!” said Robert.

“That’s sufficient. I ask no more. Good morning.”

Her parting bow remained with him like a vision. Her voice was like the tinkling of harp-strings about his ears. The colour of her riding-habit this day, harmonious with the snow-faced earth, as well as the gentle mission she had taken upon herself, strengthened his vivid fancy in blessing her as something quite divine.

He thought for the first time in his life bitterly of the great fortune which fell to gentlemen in meeting and holding equal converse with so adorable a creature ; and he thought of Rhoda as being harshly earthly ; repulsive in her coldness as that black belt of water contrasted against the snow on the shores.

He walked some paces in the track of Mrs. Lovell's horse, till his doing so seemed too presumptuous, though to turn the other way and retrace his steps was downright hateful ; and he stood apparently in profound contemplation of a ship of war and the trees of the forest behind the masts. Either the fatigue of standing, or emotion, caused his head to throb, so that he heard nothing, not even men's laughter ; but looking up suddenly, he beheld, as in a picture, Mrs. Lovell with some

gentlemen walking their horses towards him. The lady gazed softly over his head, letting her eyes drop a quiet recognition in passing; one or two of the younger gentlemen stared mockingly.

Edward Blancove was by Mrs. Lovell's side. His eyes fixed upon Robert with steady scrutiny, and Robert gave him a similar inspection, though not knowing why. It was like a child's open look, and he was feeling childish, as if his brain had ceased to act. One of the older gentlemen, with a military aspect, squared his shoulders, and touching an end of his moustache, said, half challengingly :

“ You are dismounted to-day ? ”

“ I have only one horse,” Robert simply replied.

Algernon Blancove came last. He neither spoke nor looked at his enemy, but warily clutched his whip. All went by, riding into line some paces distant; and again they laughed as they bent forward to the lady, shouting.

“ Odd, to have out the horses on a day like this,” Robert thought, and resumed his musing as before. The lady's track now led him homeward, for he had no will of his own. Rounding

the lane, he was surprised to see Mrs. Boulby by the hedge. She bobbed like a beggar woman, with a rueful face.

"My dear," she said, in apology for her presence, "I shouldn't ha' interfered, if there was fair play. I'm Englishwoman enough for that. I'd have stood by, as if you was a stranger. Gentlemen always give fair play before a woman. That's why I come, lest this appointment should ha' proyed a pitfall to you. Now you'll come home, won't you; and forgive me?"

"I'll come to the old 'Pilot' now, mother," said Robert, pressing her hand.

"That's right; and ain't angry with me for following of you?"

"Follow your own game, mother."

"I did, Robert; and nice and vexed I am, if I'm correct in what I heard say, as that lady and her folk passed, never heeding an old woman's ears. They made a bet of you, dear, they did."

"I hope the lady won," said Robert, scarce hearing.

"And it *was* she who won, dear. She was to get you to meet her, and give up, and be beaten

like, as far as I could understand their chatter : gentlefolks laugh so when they talk ; and they can afford to laugh, for they has the best of it. But I'm vexed ; just as if I'd felt big and had burst. I want you to be peaceful, of course I do ; but I don't like my boy made a bet of."

"Oh, tush, mother," went Robert, impatiently.

"I heard 'em, my dear ; and complimenting the lady they was, as they passed me. If it vexes you my thinking it, I wont, dear ; I reelly wont. I see it lowers you, for there you are at your hat again. It *is* lowering, to be made a bet of. I've that spirit that, if you was well and sound, I'd rather have you fighting 'em. She's a pleasant enough lady to look at, not a doubt ; small boned, and slim, and fair."

Robert asked which way they had gone.

"Back to the stables, my dear ; I heard 'em say so, because one gentleman said that the spectacle was over, and the lady had gained the day ; and the snow was balling in the horses' feet ; and go they'd better, before my lord saw them out. And another said, you were a wild man she'd tamed ; and they said, you ought to wear a collar,

with Mrs. Lovell's, her name, graved on it. But don't you be vexed ; you may guess they're not my Robert's friends. And, I do assure you, Robert, your hat's neat, if you'd only let it be comfortable : such fidgeting worries the brim. You're best in appearance—and I always said it—when stripped for boxing. Hats are gentlemen's things, and becomes them like as if a title to their heads ; though you'd bear being *Sir* Robert, that you would ; and for that matter, your hat is agreeable to behold, and not like the run of our Sunday hats ; only you don't seem easy in it. Oh, oh ! my tongue's a yard too long. It's the poor head aching, and me to forget it. It's because you never will act invalidy ; and I remember how handsome you were one day in the field behind our house, when you boxed a wager with Simon Billet, the waterman ; and you was made a bet of then, for my husband betted on you ; and that's what made me think of comparisons of you out of your hat and you in it."

Thus did Mrs. Boulby chatter along the way. There was an eminence a little out of the road, overlooking the Fairly stables. Robert left her

and went to this point, from whence he beheld the horsemen with the grooms at the horses' heads.

"Thank God, I've only been a fool for five minutes!" he summed up his sensations at the sight. He shut his eyes, praying with all his might never to meet Mrs. Lovell more. It was impossible for him to combat the suggestion that she had befooled him; yet his chivalrous faith in women led him to believe that, as she knew Dahlia's history, she would certainly do her best for the poor girl, and keep her word to him. The throbbing of his head stopped all further thought. It had become violent. He tried to gather his ideas, but the effort was like that of a light dreamer to catch the sequence of a dream, when blackness follows close up, devouring all that is said and done. In despair, he thought with kindness of Mrs. Boulby's brandy.

"Mother," he said, rejoining her, "I've got a notion brandy can't hurt a man when he's in bed. I'll go to bed, and you shall brew me some; and you'll let no one come nigh me; and if I talk

light-headed, its blank paper and scribble, mind that.”

The widow promised devoutly to obey all his directions; but he had begun to talk light-headed before he was undrest. He called on the name of a Major Waring, of whom Mrs. Boulby had heard him speak tenderly as a gentleman not ashamed to be his friend; first reproaching him for not being by, and then by the name of Percy, calling to him endearingly, and reproaching himself for not having written to him.

“Two to one, and in the dark!” he kept moaning: “and I one to twenty, Percy, all in broad day. Was it fair, I ask?”

Robert’s outcries became anything but ‘blank paper and scribble’ to the widow, when he mentioned Nic Sedgett’s name, and said: “Look over his right temple: he’s got my mark a second time.”

Hanging by his bedside, Mrs. Boulby strung together, bit by bit, the history of that base midnight attack, which had sent her glorious boy bleeding to her. Nic Sedgett, she could understand, was the accomplice of one of the

Fairly gentlemen ; but of which one, she could not discover, and consequently set him down as Mr. Algernon Blancove.

By diligent inquiry, she heard that Algernon had been seen in company with the infamous Nic, and likewise that the countenance of Nicodemus was reduced to accept the consolation of a poultice, which was confirmation sufficient. By nightfall Robert was in the doctor's hands, unconscious of Mrs. Boulby's breach of agreement. His father and his aunt were informed of his condition, and prepared, both of them, to bow their heads to the close of an ungodly career. It was known over Warbeach, that Robert lay in danger, and believed that he was dying.

CHAPTER III.

GIVES A GLIMPSE OF WHAT POOR VILLANIES
THE STORY CONTAINS.

MRS. BOULBY's ears had not deceived her; it had been a bet; and the day would have gone disastrously with Robert, if Mrs. Lovell had not won her bet. What was heroism to Warbeach, appeared very outrageous blackguardism up at Fairly. It was there believed by the gentlemen, though rather against evidence, that the man was a sturdy ruffian, and an infuriated sot. The first suggestion was to drag him before the magistrates; but, against this Algernon protested, declaring his readiness to defend himself, with so vehement a magnanimity, that it was clearly seen the man had a claim on him. Lord Elling, however, when he was told of these systematic assaults upon one of his guests, announced his

resolve to bring the law into operation. Algernon heard it as the knell to the expiry of his visit.

He was too happy to go away willingly; and the great Jew City of London was exceedingly hot for him at that period; but to stay and risk an exposure of his extinct military career, was not possible. In his despair, he took Mrs. Lovell entirely into his confidence; in doing which, he only filled up the outlines of what she already knew concerning Edward. He was too useful to the lady for her to afford to let him go. No other youth called her “angel” for listening complacently to strange stories of men and their dilemmas; no one fetched and carried for her like Algernon; and she was a woman who cherished dog-like adoration, and could not part with it. She had also the will to reward it.

At her intercession, Robert was spared an introduction to the magistrates. She made light of his misdemeanours, assuring everybody that so splendid a horseman deserved to be dealt with differently from other offenders. The

gentlemen who waited upon Farmer Eccles went in obedience to her orders.

Then came the scene on Ditley Marsh, described to that assembly at the ‘Pilot,’ by Stephen Bilton, when she perceived that Robert was manageable in silken trammels, and made a bet that she would show him tamed. She won her bet, and saved the gentlemen from soiling their hands, for which they had conceived a pressing necessity, and they thanked her, and paid their money over to Algernon, whom she constituted her treasurer. She was called ‘the man-tamer,’ gracefully acknowledging the compliment. Colonel Barclay, the moustachioed horseman, who had spoken the few words to Robert in passing, now remarked that there was an end of the military profession.

“I surrender my sword,” he said, gallantly.

Another declared that ladies would now act in lieu of causing an appeal to arms.

“*Similia similibus, &c.*,” said Edward. “They can, apparently, cure what they originate.”

“Ah, the poor sex!” Mrs. Lovell sighed.

“ When we bring the millennium to you, I believe you will still have a word against Eve.”

The whole parade back to the stables was marked by pretty speeches.

“ By Jove ! but he ought to have gone down on his knees, like a horse when you’ve tamed him,” said Lord Suckling, the young guardsman.

“ I would mark a distinction between a horse and a brave man, Lord Suckling,” said the lady ; and such was Mrs. Lovell’s dignity when an allusion to Robert was forced on her, and her wit and ease were so admirable, that none of those who rode with her thought of sitting in judgment on her conduct. Women can make for themselves new spheres, new laws, if they will assume their right to be eccentric as an unquestionable thing, and always reserve a season for showing forth like the conventional women of society.

The evening was Mrs. Lovell’s time for this important re-establishment of her position ;

and many a silly youth who had sailed pleasantly with her all the day, was wrecked when he tried to carry on the topics where she reigned the lady of the drawing-room. Moreover, not being eccentric from vanity, but simply to accommodate what had once been her tastes, and were now her necessities, she avoided slang, and all the insignia of eccentricity.

Thus she mastered the secret of keeping the young men respectfully enthusiastic; so that their irrepressible praises did not (as is usual when these are in acclamation) drag her to their level; and the female world, with which she was perfectly feminine, and as silkenly insipid every evening of her life as was needed to restore her reputation, admitted that she belonged to it, which is everything to an adventurous spirit of that sex: indeed, the sole secure basis of operations.

You are aware that men's faith in a woman whom her sisters discountenance, and partially repudiate, is uneasy, however deeply they may be charmed. On the other hand, she may be

guilty of prodigious oddities without much disturbing their reverence, while she is in the feminine circle.

But what fatal breath was it coming from Mrs. Lovell that was always inflaming men to mutual animosity? What encouragement had she given to Algernon, that Lord Suckling should be jealous of him? And what to Lord Suckling, that Algernon should loathe the sight of the young lord? And why was each desirous of showing his manhood in combat before an eminent peacemaker?

Edward laughed—"Ah-ha!" and rubbed his hands as at a special confirmation of his prophecy, when Algernon came into his room and said, "I shall fight that fellow Suckling. Hang me if I can stand his impudence! I want to have a shot at a man of my own set, just to let Peggy Lovell see! I know what she thinks."

"Just to let Mrs. Lovell see!" Edward echoed. "She has seen it lots of times, my dear Algy. Come; this looks lively. I was sure she would soon be sick of the water-gruel of peace."

"I tell you she's got nothing to do with it,

Ned. Don't be confoundedly unjust. She didn't tell me to go and seek him. How can she help his whispering to her? And then she looks over at me, and I swear I'm not going to be defended by a woman. She *must* fancy I haven't got the pluck of a flea. I know what her idea of young fellows is. Why, she said to me, when Suckling went off from her, the other day, 'These are our guards.' I shall fight him."

"Do," said Edward.

"Will you take a challenge?"

"I'm a lawyer, Mr. Mars."

"You won't take a challenge for a friend, when he's insulted?"

"I reply again, I am a lawyer. But this is what I'll do, if you like. I'll go to Mrs. Lovell, and inform her that it is your desire to gain her esteem by fighting with pistols. That will accomplish the purpose you seek. It will possibly disappoint her, for she will have to stop the affair; but women are born to be disappointed—they want so much."

"I'll fight him some way or other," said Algernon, glowering; and then his face became bright:

"I say, didn't she manage that business beautifully this morning? Not another woman in the world could have done it."

"Oh, Una and the Lion! Mrs. Valentine and Orson! Did you bet with the rest?" his cousin asked.

"I lost my tenner; but what's that?"

"There will be an additional five to hand over to the man Sedgett. What's that?"

"No, hang it!" Algernon shouted.

"You've paid your ten for the shadow cheerfully. Pay your five for the substance."

"Do you mean to say that Sedgett——" Algernon stared.

"Miracles, if you come to examine them, Algy, have generally had a pathway prepared for them; and the miracle of the power of female persuasion exhibited this morning was not quite independent of the preliminary agency of a scoundrel."

"So, that's why *you* didn't bet." Algernon signified the opening of his intelligence with his eyelids, pronouncing 'by jingos' and 'by Joves,' to ease the sudden rush of ideas within him.

" You might have let me into the secret, Ned. I'd lose any number of tens to Peggy Lovell, but a fellow don't like to be in the dark."

" Except, Algy, that when you carry light, you're a general illuminator. Let the matter drop. Sedgett has saved you from annoyance. Take him in his five pounds."

" Annoyance be hanged, my good Ned !" Algernon was aroused to reply. " I don't complain, and I've done my best to stand in front of you ; and as you've settled the fellow, I say nothing ; but, between us two, who's the guilty party, and who's the victim ?"

" Didn't he tell you he had you in his power ?"

" I don't remember that he did."

" Well, I heard him. The sturdy cur refused to be bribed, so there was only one way of quieting him ; and you see what a thrashing does for that sort of beast. I, Algy, never abandon a friend ; mark that. Take the five pounds to Sedgett."

Algernon strode about the room. " First of all, you stick me up in a theatre, so that I'm

seen with a girl ; and then you get behind me, and let me be pelted,” he began grumbling. “ And ask a fellow for money, who hasn’t a farthing ! I shan’t literally have a farthing till that horse ‘Templemore’ runs ; and then, by George ! I’ll pay my debts. Jews are awful things !”

“ How much do you require at present ? ” said Edward, provoking his appetite for a loan.

“ Oh, fifty—that is, just now. More like a thousand when I get to town. And where it’s to come from !—but never mind. ’Pon my soul, I pity the fox I run down here. I feel I’m exactly in his case in London. However, if I can do you any service, Ned——”

Edward laughed. “ You might have done me the service of not excusing yourself to the Squire when he came here, in such a way as to implicate me.”

“ But I was so tremendously badgered, Ned.”

“ You had a sort of gratification in letting the Squire crow over his brother. And he did crow for a time.”

“ On my honour, Ned, as to crowing ! He

went away cursing at me. Peggy Lovell managed it somehow for you. I was really awfully bad-gered."

"Yes; but you know what a man my father is. He hasn't the Squire's philosophy in those affairs."

"'Pon my soul, Mr. Ned, I never guessed it before; but I rather fancy you got clear with Sir Billy the banker by washing in my basin—eh, did you?"

Edward looked straight at his cousin, saying, "You deserved worse than that. You were treacherous. You proved you were not to be trusted; and yet, you see, I trust you. Call it my folly. Of course (and I don't mind telling you) I used my wits to turn the point of the attack. I may be what they call unscrupulous when I'm surprised. I have to look to money as well as you; and if my father thought it went in a—what he considers—wrong direction, the source would be choked by paternal morality. You betrayed me. Listen."

"I tell you, Ned, I merely said to my governor——"

"Listen to me. You betrayed me. I defended myself; that is, I've managed so that I may still be of service to you. It was a near shave; but you now see the value of having a character with one's father. Just open my writing-desk there, and toss out the cheque-book. I confess I can't see why you should have objected—but let that pass. How much do you want? Fifty? Say forty-five, and five I'll give you to pay to Sedgett—making fifty. Eighty before, and fifty—one hundred and thirty. Write that you owe me that sum, on a piece of paper. I can't see why you should wish to appear so uncommonly virtuous."

Algernon scribbled the written acknowledgment which he despised giving, but was always ready to give for the money, and said, as he put the cheque in his purse: "It was this infernal fellow completely upset me. If you were worried by a bull-dog, by Jove, Ned, you'd lose your coolness. He bothered my head off. Ask me now, and I'll do anything on earth for you. My back's broad. Sir Billy can't think worse of me than he does. Do you want to break positively

with that pretty rival to Peggy L.? I've got a scheme to relieve you, my poor old Ned, and make everybody happy. I'll lay the foundations of a fresh and brilliant reputation for myself."

Algernon took a chair. Edward was fathoms deep in his book.

The former continued: "I'd touch on the money-question last, with any other fellow than you; but you always know that money's the hinge, and nothing else lifts a man out of a scrape. It costs a stiff pull on your banker, and that reminds me, you couldn't go to Sir Billy for it; you'd have to draw in advance, by degrees: anyhow, look here:—There are lots of young farmers who want to emigrate and want wives and money. I know one. It's no use going into particulars, but it's worth thinking over. Life is made up of mutual help, Ned. You can help another fellow better than yourself. As for me, when I'm in a hobble, I give you my word of honour, I'm just like a baby, and haven't an idea at my own disposal. The same with others. You *can't* manage without somebody's assistance. What do you say, old boy?"

Edward raised his head from his book. "Some views of life deduced from your private experience?" he observed; and Algernon cursed at book-worms, who would never take hints, and left him.

But when he was by himself, Edward pitched his book upon the floor and sat reflecting. The sweat started on his forehead. He was compelled to look into his black volume and study it. His desire was to act humanely and generously; but the question inevitably recurred: "How can I utterly dash my prospects in the world?" It would be impossible to bring Dahlia to great houses; and he liked great houses and the charm of mixing among delicately-bred women. On the other hand, lawyers have married beneath them—married cooks, housemaids, governesses, and so forth. And what has a lawyer to do with a dainty lady, who will constantly distract him with finicking civilities and speculations in unprofitable regions? What he does want is a woman amiable as a surface of parchment, serviceable as his inkstand; one who will be like the wig in which he closes his

forensic term, disreputable from over wear, but suited to the purpose, and dear.

“Ah! if I meant to be nothing but a lawyer!” Edward stopped the flow of this current in Dahlia’s favour. His passion for her was silent. Was it dead? It was certainly silent. Since Robert had come down to play his wild game of persecution at Fairly, the simple idea of Dahlia had been Edward’s fever. He detested brute force, with a finely-witted man’s full loathing and Dahlia’s obnoxious champion had grown to be associated in his mind with Dahlia. He swept them both from his recollection abhorrently, for in his recollection he could not divorce them. He pretended to suppose that Dahlia, whose only reproach to him was her suffering, participated in the scheme to worry him. He could even forget her beauty—forget all, save the unholy fetters binding him. She seemed to imprison him in bare walls. He meditated on her character. She had no strength. She was timid, comfort-loving, fond of luxury, credulous, preposterously conventional; that is, desirous more than the ordinary run of women of being hedged about

and guarded by ceremonies—"mere ceremonies," said Edward, forgetting the notion he entertained of women not so protected. But it may be, that in playing the part of fool and coward, we cease to be mindful of the absolute necessity for sheltering the weak from that monstrous allied army, the cowards and the fools. He admitted even to himself that he had deceived her, at the same time denouncing her unheard-of capacity of belief, which had placed him in a miserable hobble, and that was the truth.

Now, men confessing themselves in a miserable hobble, and knowing they are guilty of the state of things lamented by them, intend to drown that part of their nature which disturbs them by its outcry. The submission to a tangle that could be cut through instantaneously by any exertion of a noble will, convicts them. They had better not confide, even to their secret hearts, that they are afflicted by their conscience and the generosity of their sentiments, for it will be only to say that these high qualities are on the failing side. Their inclination, under the circum-

stances, is generally base, and no less a counsellor than uncorrupted common sense, when they are in such a hobble, will sometimes advise them to be base. But, in admitting the plea which common sense puts forward on their behalf, we may fairly ask them to be masculine in their baseness. Or, in other words, since they must be selfish, let them be so without the poltroonery of selfishness. Edward's wish was to be perfectly just, as far as he could be now—just to himself as well ; for how was he to prove of worth and aid to anyone depending on him, if he stood crippled ? Just, also, to his family ; to his possible posterity ; and just to Dahlia. His task was to reconcile the variety of justness due upon all sides. The struggle, we will assume, was severe, for he thought so ; he thought of going to Dahlia and speaking the word of separation ; of going to her family and stating his offence, without personal exculpation ; thus masculine in baseness he was in idea ; but poltroonery triumphed, the picture of himself facing his sin and its victims dismayed him, and his struggle ended in his con-

sidering as to the fit employment of one thousand pounds in his possession, the remainder of a small legacy, hitherto much cherished.

A day later, Mrs. Lovell said to him : “ Have you heard of that unfortunate young man ? I am told that he lies in great danger from a blow on the back of his head. He looked ill when I saw him, and however mad he may be, I’m sorry harm should have come to one who is really brave. Gentle means are surely best. It is so with horses, it must be so with men. As to women, I don’t pretend to unriddle them.”

“ Gentle means are decidedly best,” said Edward, perceiving that her little dog, Algy, had carried news to her, and that she was setting herself to fathom him. “ You gave an eminent example of it yesterday. I was so sure of the result that I didn’t bet against you.”

“ Why not have backed me ?”

The hard young legal face withstood the attack of her soft blue eyes, out of which a thousand needles flew, seeking a weak point in the mask.

“ The compliment was, to incite you to a super-human effort.”

“Then why not pay the compliment?”

“I never pay compliments to transparent merit; I do not hold candles to lamps.”

“True,” said she.

“And as gentle means are so admirable, it would be as well to stop incision and imbruining between those two boys.”

“Which?” she asked, innocently.

“Suckling and Algy.”

“Is it possible? They are such boys.”

“Exactly of the kind to do it. Don’t you know?” and Edward explained elaborately and cruelly the character of the boys who rushed into conflicts. Colour deep as evening red confused her cheeks, and she said, “We must stop them.”

“Alas!”—he shook his head; “if it’s not too late.”

“It never is too late.”

“Perhaps not, when the embodiment of gentle means is so determined.”

“Come; I believe they are in the billiard room now, and you shall see,” she said.

The pair were found in the billiard room, even as a pair of terriers that remember a bone. Mrs.

Lovell proposed a game, and offered herself for partner to Lord Suckling.

“Till total defeat do us part,” the young nobleman acquiesced; and total defeat befell them. During the play of the balls, Mrs. Lovell threw a jealous intentness of observation upon all the strokes made by Algernon; saying nothing, but just looking at him when he did a successful thing. She winked at some quiet stately betting that went on between him and Lord Suckling.

They were at first preternaturally polite and formal towards one another; by degrees, the influence at work upon them was manifested in a thaw of this stiff demeanour, and they fell into curt dialogues, which Mrs. Lovell gave herself no concern to encourage too early.

Edward saw, and was astonished himself to feel that she had ceased to breathe that fatal inciting breath, which made men vindictively emulous of her favour, and mad to match themselves for a claim to the chief smile. No perceptible change was displayed. She was Mrs. Lovell still; vivacious and soft; flame coloured, with the arrowy eyelashes; a pleasant companion, who did

not play the woman obtrusively among men, and show a thirst for homage. All the difference appeared to be, that there was an absence as of some evil spiritual emanation.

And here a thought crossed him—one of the memorable little evanescent thoughts which sway us by our chance weakness; “Does she think me wanting in physical courage?”

Now, though the difference between them had been owing to a scornful remark that she had permitted herself to utter, on his refusal to accept a quarrel with one of her numerous satellites, his knowledge of her worship of brains, and his pride in his certain possession of the burdensome weight, had quite precluded his guessing that she might haply suppose him to be deficient in personal bravery. He was astounded by the reflection that she had thus misjudged him. It was distracting; sober-thoughted as he was by nature. He watched the fair simplicity of her new manner with a jealous eye. Her management of the two youths was exquisite; but to him, Edward, she had never condescended to show herself thus mediating and amiable. Why? Clearly, because

she conceived that he had no virile fire in his composition. Did the detestable little devil think silly duelling a display of valour? Did the fair seraph think him anything less than a man?

How beautifully hung the yellow loop of her hair as she leaned over the board! How gracious she was and like a goddess with these boys, as he called them! She rallied her partner, not letting him forget that he had the honour of being her partner; while she appeared envious of Algernon's skill, and talked to both and got them upon common topics, and laughed, and was like a fair English flower of womanhood; nothing deadly.

"There, Algy; you have beaten us. I don't think I'll have Lord Suckling for my partner any more," she said, putting up her wand, and pouting.

"You don't bear malice?" said Algernon, revived.

"There is my hand. Now you must play a game alone with Lord Suckling, and beat him; mind you beat him, or it will redound to my discredit."

With which, she and Edward left them.

"Algy was a little crest-fallen, and no wonder," she said. "He is soon set up again. They will be good friends now."

"Isn't it odd, that they should be ready to risk their lives for trifles?"

Thus Edward tempted her to discuss the subject which he had in his mind.

She felt intuitively the trap in his voice.

"Ah, yes," she replied; "it must be because they know their lives are not precious."

So utterly at her mercy had he fallen, that her pronunciation of that word 'precious' carried a severe sting to him, and it was not spoken with peculiar emphasis; on the contrary, she wished to indicate that she was of his way of thinking, as regarded this decayed method of settling disputes. He turned to leave her.

"You go to your Adeline, I presume," she said.

"Ah! that reminds me. I have never thanked you."

"For my good services? such as they are. Sir William will be very happy, and it was for him, a little more than for you, that I went out of my way to be a match-maker."

"It was her character, of course, that struck you as being so eminently suited to mine."

"Can I tell what is the character of a girl? She is mild and shy, and extremely gentle. In all probability she has a passion for battles and bloodshed. I judged from your father's point of view. She has money, and you are to have money; and the union of money and money is supposed to be a good thing. And besides, you are variable, and off to-morrow what you are on to-day: is it not so? and heiresses are never jilted. Colonel Barclay is only awaiting your retirement. *Le roi est mort; vive le roi!* Heiresses may cry it like kingdoms."

"I thought," said Edward, meaningly, "the Colonel had better taste."

"Do you not know that my friends are my friends because they are not allowed to dream they will be anything else? If they are taken poorly, I commend them to a sea-voyage—Africa, the North-West Passage, the source of the Nile. Men with their vanity wounded may discover wonders! They return friendly as before,

whether they have done the Geographical Society a service or not. That is, they generally do."

"Then I begin to fancy I must try those latitudes."

"Oh ! you are my relative."

He scarcely knew that he had uttered "Margaret."

She replied to it frankly, "Yes, Cousin Ned. You have made the voyage, you see, and have come back friends with me. The variability of opals ! Ah ! Sir John, you join us in season. We were talking of opals. Is the opal a gem that stands to represent women ?"

Sir John Capes smoothed his knuckles with silken palms, and with courteous antique grin, responded, "It is a gem I would never dare to offer to a lady's acceptance."

"It is by repute unlucky ; so you never can have done so."

"Exquisite !" exclaimed the veteran in smiles, "if what you deign to imply were only true !"

They entered the drawing-room among the ladies.

Edward whispered in Mrs. Lovell's ear, "He is in need of the voyage."

"He is very near it," she answered in the same key, and swam into general conversation.

Her cold wit, Satanic as the gleam of it struck through his mind, gave him a throb of desire to gain possession of her, and crush her.

CHAPTER IV.

EDWARD TAKES HIS COURSE.

THE writing of a letter to Dahlia had previously been attempted and abandoned as a sickening task. Like an idle boy with his holiday imposition, Edward shelved it among the nightmares, saying, "How can I sit down and lie to her!" and thinking that silence would prepare her bosom for the coming truth.

Silence is commonly the slow poison used by those who mean to murder love. There is nothing violent about it; no shock is given; Hope is not abruptly strangled, but merely dreams of evil, and fights with gradually stifling shadows. When the last convulsions come they are not terrific; the frame has been weakened for dissolution; love dies like natural decay. It seems the kindest way of doing a cruel thing.

But Dahlia wrote, crying out her agony at the torture. Possibly your nervously-organized natures require a modification of the method. Edward now found himself able to conduct a correspondence. He despatched the following:—

“MY DEAR DAHLIA,

“Of course I cannot expect you to be aware of the bewildering occupations of a country house, where a man has literally not five minutes’ time to call his own; so I pass by your reproaches. My father has gone at last. He has manifested an extraordinary liking for my society, and I am to join him elsewhere—perhaps run over to Paris (*your city*)—but at present for a few days I am my own master, and the first thing I do is to attend to your demands: *not* to write ‘two lines,’ but to give you a good long letter.

“What on earth makes you fancy me unwell? You know I am never unwell. And as to your nursing me—when has there ever been any need for it?

“You must positively learn patience. I have been absent a week or so, and you talk of

coming down here and haunting the house ! Such ghosts as you meet with strange treatment when they go about unprotected, let me give you warning. You have my full permission to walk out in the Parks for exercise. I think you are bound to do it, for your health's sake.

" Pray discontinue that talk about the alteration in your looks. You must learn that you are no longer a child. Cease to write like a child. If people stare at you, as you say, you are very well aware it is not because you are becoming plain. You do not mean it, I know ; but there is a disingenuousness in remarks of this sort that is to me exceedingly distasteful. Avoid the shadow of hypocrisy. Women are subject to it—and it is quite innocent, no doubt. I won't lecture you.

" My cousin Algernon is here with me. He has not spoken of your sister. Your fears in that direction are quite unnecessary. He is attached to a female cousin of ours, a very handsome person, witty, and highly sensible, who dresses as well as the lady you talk about having seen one day in Wrexby Church. Her lady's-

maid is a Frenchwoman, which accounts for it. You have not forgotten the boulevards ?

"I wish you to go on with your lessons in French. Educate yourself, and you will rise superior to these distressing complaints. I recommend you to read the newspapers daily. Buy nice picture-books, if the papers are too matter-of-fact for you. By looking eternally inward, you teach yourself to fret, and the consequence is, or will be, that you wither. No constitution can stand it. All the ladies here take an interest in Parliamentary affairs. They can talk to men upon men's themes. It is impossible to explain to you how wearisome an everlasting nursery prattle becomes. The idea that men ought never to tire of it is founded on some queer belief that they are not mortal.

Parliament opens in February. My father wishes me to stand for Selborough. If he or some one will do the talking to the tradesmen, and provide the beer and the bribes, I have no objection. In that case my law goes to the winds. I'm bound to make a show of obedience,

for he has scarcely got over my summer's trip. He holds me a prisoner to him for Heaven knows how long—it may be months.

"As for the heiress whom he has here to make a match for me, he and I must have a pitched battle about her by and by. At present my purse insists upon my not offending him. When will old men understand young ones? I burn your letters, and beg you to follow the example. Old letters are the dreariest ghosts in the world, and you cannot keep more treacherous rubbish in your possession. A discovery would exactly ruin me.

"Your purchase of a black-velvet bonnet with pink ribbons, was very suitable. Or did you write 'blue' ribbons? But your complexion can bear anything.

"You talk of being annoyed when you walk out. Remember, that no woman who knows at all how to conduct herself, need for one moment suffer annoyance.

"What is the 'feeling' you speak of? I cannot conceive any 'feeling' that should make you helpless when you consider that you are

insulted. There are women who have natural dignity, and women who have none.

" You ask the names of the gentlemen here :— Lord Carey, Lord Wippern (both leave to-morrow), Sir John Capes, Colonel Barclay, Lord Suckling. The ladies :—Mrs. Gosling, Miss Gosling, Lady Carey. Mrs. Anybody—to any extent.

" They pluck hen's feathers all day and half the night. I see them out, and make my bow to the next batch of visitors, and then I don't know where I am.

" Read poetry, if it makes up for my absence, as you say. Repeat it aloud, minding the pulsation of feet. Go to the theatre now and then, and take your landlady with you. If she's a cat, fit one of your dresses on the servant girl, and take her. You only want a companion—a dummy will do. Take a box and sit behind the curtain, back to the audience.

" I wrote to my wine-merchant to send champagne and sherry. I hope he did : the champagne in pints and half-pints ; if not,

return them instantly. I know how Economy, sitting solitary, poor thing, would not dare to let the froth of a whole pint bottle fly out.

“ Be an obedient girl and please me.

“ Your stern tutor,

“ EDWARD THE FIRST.”

He read this epistle twice over to satisfy himself that it was a warm effusion, and not too tender; and it satisfied him. By a stretch of imagination, he could feel that it represented him to her as in a higher atmosphere, considerate for her, and not so intimate that she could deem her spirit to be sharing it. Another dose of silence succeeded this discreet administration of speech.

Dahlia replied with letter upon letter; blindly impassioned, and again singularly cold; but with no reproaches. She was studying, she said. Her head ached a little; only a little. She walked; she read poetry; she begged him to pardon her for not drinking wine. She was glad that he burnt her letters, which were so foolish that if she could have the courage to look

at them after they were written, they would never be sent. He was slightly revolted by one exclamation : “ How ambitious you are !”

“ Because I cannot sit down for life in a London lodging-house !” he thought, and eyed her distantly as a poor good creature who had already accepted her distinctive residence in another sphere than his. From such a perception of her humanity, it was natural that his livelier sense of it should diminish. He felt that he had awakened ; and he shook her off.

And now he set to work to subdue Mrs. Lovell. His own subjugation was the first fruit of his effort. It was quite unacknowledged by him : but when two are at this game, the question arises—“ Which can live without the other ?” and horrid pangs smote him to hear her telling musically of the places she was journeying to, the men she would see, and the chances of their meeting again before he was married to the heiress Adeline.

“ I have yet to learn that I am engaged to her,” he said.

Mrs. Lovell gave him a fixed look:

"She has a half-brother."

He stepped away in a fury.

"Devil!" he muttered, absolutely muttered it, knowing that he fooled and frowned like a stage-hero in stagy heroics. "You think to hound *me* into this brutal stupidity of fighting, do you? Upon my honour," he added in his natural manner, "I believe she does, though!"

But the look became his companion. It touched and called up great vanity in his breast, and not till then could he placably confront the look. He tried a course of reading. Every morning he was down in the library, looking old in an arm-chair over his book; an intent, abstracted figure.

Mrs. Lovell would enter and eye him carelessly; utter little commonplaces and go forth. The silly words struck on his brain. The book seemed hollow; sounded hollow as he shut it. This woman breathed of active, striving life. She was a spur to black energies; a plumed glory; impulsive to chivalry. Everything she said and did held men in scales, and approved or rejected them.

Intoxication followed this new conception of her. He lost altogether his right judgment; even the cooler after-thoughts were lost. What sort of man had Harry been, her first husband? A dashing soldier, a quarrelsome duellist, a dull dog. But, dull to her? She, at least, was reverential to the memory of him.

She lisped now and then of "my husband," very prettily, and with intense provocation; and yet she worshipped brains. Evidently she thirsted for that rare union of brains and bravery in a man, and would never surrender till she had discovered it. Perhaps she fancied it did not exist. It might be that she took Edward as the type of brains, and Harry of bravery, and supposed that the two qualities were not to be had actually in conjunction.

Her admiration of his (Edward's) wit, therefore, only strengthened the idea she entertained of his deficiency in that other companion manly virtue.

Edward must have been possessed, for he ground his teeth villainously in supposing himself the victim of this outrageous suspicion. And

how to prove it false ? How to prove it false in a civilized age, among sober-living men and women, with whom the violent assertion of bravery would certainly imperil his claim to brains ? His head was like a stew-pan over the fire, bubbling endlessly.

He railed at her to Algernon, and astonished the youth, who thought them in a fair way to make an alliance. "Milk and capsicums," he called her, and compared her to bloody, mustard-haired Saxon Queens of history, and was childishly spiteful. And Mrs. Lovell had it all reported to her, as he was quite aware.

"The woman seeking for an anomaly wants a master."

With this pompous aphorism, he finished his reading of the fair Enigma.

Words big in the mouth serve their turn when there is no way of satisfying the intelligence.

To be her master, however, one must not begin by writhing as her slave.

The attempt to read an inscrutable woman allows her to dominate us too commandingly. So the lordly mind takes her in a hard grasp,

cracks the shell, and drawing forth the kernel, says, "This was all the puzzle."

Doubtless it is the fate which women like Mrs. Lovell provoke. The truth was, that she could read a character when it was under her eyes ; but its yesterday and to-morrow were a blank. She had no imaginative hold on anything. For which reason she was always requiring tangible signs of virtues that she esteemed.

The thirst for the shows of valour and wit was insane with her ; but she asked for nothing that she herself did not give in abundance, and with beauty superadded. Her propensity to bet sprang of her passion for combat ; she was not greedy of money, or reckless in using it ; but a difference of opinion arising, her instinct forcibly prompted her to back her own. If the stake was the risk of a lover's life, she was ready to put down the stake, and would have marvelled contemptuously at the lover complaining. "Sheep ! sheep !" she thought of those who dared not fight, and had a wavering tendency towards affixing the epithet to those who simply did not fight.

Withal, Mrs. Lovell was a sensible person ; clear-headed and shrewd ; logical, too, more than the run of her sex : I may say, profoundly practical. So much so, that she systematically reserved the after-years for enlightenment upon two or three doubts of herself, which struck her in the calm of her spirit, from time to time.

“ France,” Edward called her, in one of their colloquies.

It was an illuminating title. She liked the French (though no one was keener for the honour of her own country in opposition to them) ; she liked their splendid boyishness, their unequalled devotion, their merciless intellects ; the oneness of the nation when the sword is bare and pointing to chivalrous enterprise.

She liked their fine varnish of sentiment, which appears so flat on the surface that Englishmen suppose it to have nowhere any depth ; as if the outer coating must necessarily exhaust the stock, and what is at the source of our being can never be made visible.

She had her imagination of them as of a

streaming banner in the jaws of storm, with snows among the cloud-rents and lightning in the chasms:—which image may be accounted for by the fact that when a girl she had in adoration kissed the feet of Napoleon, the giant of the later ghosts of history.

It was a princely compliment. She received it curtseying, and disarmed the intended irony. In reply, she called him ‘Great Britain.’ I regret to say that he stood less proudly for his nation. Indeed, he flushed. He remembered articles girding at the policy of peace at any price, and half felt that Mrs. Lovell had meant to crown him with a Quaker’s hat. His title fell speedily into disuse; but, “Yes, France,” and “No, France,” continued, his effort being to fix the epithet to frivolous allusions, from which her ingenuity rescued it honourably.

Had she ever been in love? He asked her the question. She stabbed him with so straightforward an affirmative that he could not conceal the wound.

“Have I not been married?” she said.

He began to experience the fretful craving to

see the antecedents of the torturing woman spread out before him. He conceived a passion for her girlhood. He begged for portraits of her as a girl. She showed him the portrait of Harry Lovell in a locket. He held the locket between his fingers. Dead Harry was kept very warm. Could brains ever touch her emotions as bravery had done?

"Where are the brains I boast of?" he groaned, in the midst of these sensational extravagances.

The lull of action was soon to be disturbed. A letter was brought to him.

He opened it and read—

"MR. EDWARD BLANCOVE,

"When you rode by me under Fairly Park, I did not know you. I can give you a medical certificate that since then I have been in the doctor's hands. I know you now. I call upon you to meet me, with what weapons you like best, to prove that you are not a midnight assassin. The place shall be where you choose to appoint. If you decline, I will make you publicly acknowledge what you have done. If you answer, that

I am not a gentleman and you are one, I say that you have attacked me in the dark, when I was on horseback, and you are now my equal, if I like to think so. You will not talk about the law after that night. The man you employed I may punish or I may leave, though he struck the blow. But I will meet you. To-morrow, a friend of mine, who is a major in the army, will be down here, and will call on you from me ; or on any friend of yours you are pleased to name. I will not let you escape. Whether I shall face a guilty man in you, God knows ; but I know I have a right to call upon you to face me.

“I am, Sir,

“Yours truly,

“ROBERT ECCLES.”

Edward’s face grew signally white over the contents of this unprecedented challenge. The letter had been brought in to him at the breakfast table. “Read it, read it,” said Mrs. Lovell, seeing him put it by ; and he had read it with her eyes on him.

The man seemed to him a man of claws, who

clutched like a demon. Would nothing quiet him? Edward thought of bribes for the sake of peace; but a second glance at the letter assured his sagacious mind that bribes were powerless in this man's case; neither bribes nor sticks were of service. Departure from Fairly would avail as little: the tenacious devil would follow him to London; and what was worse, as a hound from Dahlia's family, he was now on the right scent, and appeared to know that he was. How was a scandal to be avoided? By leaving Fairly instantly for any place on earth, he could not avoid leaving the man behind; and if the man saw Mrs. Lovell again, her instincts as a woman of her class were not to be trusted. As likely as not she would side with the ruffian; that is, she would think he had been wronged—perhaps think that he ought to have been met. There is the democratic virus secret in every woman; it was predominant in Mrs. Lovell, according to Edward's observation of the lady. The rights of individual manhood were, as he angrily perceived, likely to be recognised by her spirit, if only they were stoutly asserted; and that in defiance of station,

of reason, of all the ideas inculcated by education and society.

"I believe she'll expect me to fight him," he exclaimed. At least, he knew she would despise him if he avoided the brutal challenge without some show of dignity.

On rising from the table, he drew Algernon aside. It was an insufferable thought that he was compelled to take his brainless cousin into his confidence, even to the extent of soliciting his counsel, but there was no help for it. In vain Edward asked himself why he had been such an idiot as to stain his hands with the affair at all. He attributed it to his regard for Algernon. Having commonly the sway of his passions, he was in the habit of forgetting that he ever lost control of them; and the fierce black mood, engendered by Robert's audacious persecution, had passed from his memory, though it was now recalled in full force.

"See what a mess you drag a man into," he said.

Algernon read a line of the letter. "Oh, confound this infernal fellow!" he shouted, in

sickly wonderment ; and snapped sharp, “ *I drag you into the mess ? Upon my honour, your coolness, Ned, is the biggest part about you, if it isn’t the best.*”

Edward’s grip fixed on him, for they were only just out of earshot of Mrs. Lovell. They went upstairs, and Algernon read the letter through.

“ ‘Midnight assassin,’ ” he repeated ; “ by Jove ! how beastly that sounds. It’s a lie that you attacked him in the dark, Ned—eh ? ”

“ I did not attack him at all,” said Edward. “ He behaved like a ruffian to you, and deserved shooting like a mad dog.”

“ Did you, though,” Algernon persisted in questioning, despite his cousin’s manifest shyness of the subject ; “ did you really go out with that man Sedgett, and stop this fellow on horseback ? He speaks of a blow. You didn’t strike him, did you, Ned ? I mean not a hit, except in self-defence ? ”

Edward bit his lip, and shot a level, reflective side-look, peculiar to him when meditating. He wished his cousin to propose that Mrs. Lovell should see the letter. He felt that by consulting

with her, he could bring her to apprehend the common sense of the position, and be so far responsible for what he might do, that she would not dare to let her heart be rebellious towards him subsequently. If he himself went to her it would look too much like pleading for her intercession. The subtle directness of the woman's spirit had to be guarded against at every point.

He replied to Algernon :

"What I did was on your behalf. Oblige me by not interrogating me. I give you my positive assurance that I encouraged no unmanly assault on him."

"That'll do, that'll do," said Algernon, eager not to hear more, lest there should come an explanation of what he had heard. "Of course, then, this fellow has no right—the devil's in him ! If we could only make him murder Sedgett and get hanged for it ! He's got a friend who's a major in the army ? Oh, come, I say ; this is pitching it too stiff. I shall insist upon seeing his commission. Really, Ned, I can't advise. I'll stand by you, that you may be sure of—stand by you ; but what the deuce to say to help you ! Go before

the magistrate. . . . Get Lord Elling to issue a warrant to prevent a breach of the peace. No ; that won't do. This quack of a major in the army's to call to-morrow. I don't mind, if he shows his credentials all clear, amusing him in any manner he likes. I can't see the best scheme. Hang it, Ned, it's very hard upon me to ask me to do the thinking. I always go to Peggy Lovell when I'm bothered. There—Mrs. Lovell ! Mistress Lovell ! Madame ! my Princess Lovell, if you want me to pronounce respectable titles to her name. You're too proud to ask a woman to help you, ain't you, Ned ?”

“ No,” said Edward, mildly. “ In some cases their wits are keen enough. One doesn't like to drag her into such a business.”

“ Hm,” went Algernon. “ I don't think she's so innocent of it as you fancy.”

“ She's very clever,” said Edward.

“ She's awfully clever !” cried Algernon. He paused to give room for more praises of her, and then pursued : “ She's so kind. That's what you don't credit her for. I'll go and consult her, if positively you don't mind. Trust her for keep-

ing it quiet. Come, Ned, she's sure to hit upon the right thing. May I go?"

"It's your affair, more than mine," said Edward.

"Have it so, if you like," returned the good-natured fellow. "It's worth while consulting her, just to see how neatly she'll take it. Bless your heart, she won't know a bit more than you want her to know. I'm off to her now." He carried away the letter.

Edward's own practical judgment would have advised his instantly sending a short reply to Robert, explaining that he was simply in conversation with the man Sedgett, when Robert, the old enemy of the latter, rode by, and that, while regretting Sedgett's proceedings, he could not be held accountable for them. But it was useless to think of acting in accordance with his reason. Mrs. Lovell was queen, and sat in reason's place. It was absolutely necessary to conciliate her approbation of his conduct in this dilemma, by submitting to the decided unpleasantness of talking with her on a subject that fevered him, and of allowing her to suppose that he required the help

of her sagacity. Such was the humiliation imposed upon him. Further than this he had nothing to fear, for no woman could fail to be overborne by the masculine force of his brain in an argument. The humiliation was bad enough, and half tempted him to think that his old dream of working as a hard student, with fair and gentle Dahlia ministering to his comforts, and too happy to call herself his, was best. Was it not, after one particular step had been taken, the manliest life he could have shaped out? Or did he imagine it so at this moment, because he was a coward, and because pride, and vanity, and ferocity alternately had to screw him up to meet the consequences of his acts, instead of the great heart?

If a coward, Dahlia was his home, his refuge, his sanctuary. Mrs. Lovell was perdition and its scorching fires to a man with a taint of cowardice in him.

Whatever he was, Edward's vanity would not permit him to acknowledge himself that. Still, he did not call on his heart to play inspiriting music. His ideas turned to subterfuge. His

aim was to keep the good opinion of Mrs. Lovell while he quieted Robert ; and he entered straight-way upon that very perilous course, the attempt, for the sake of winning her, to bewilder and deceive a woman's instincts.

CHAPTER V.

MAJOR PERCY WARING.

OVER a fire in one of the upper sitting-rooms of the Pilot Inn, Robert sat with his friend, the beloved friend of whom he used to speak to Dahlia and Rhoda, too proudly not to seem betraying the weaker point of pride. This friend had accepted the title from a private soldier of his regiment; to be capable of doing which, a man must be both officer and gentleman in a sterner and less liberal sense than is expressed by that everlasting phrase in the mouth of the military parrot. Major Percy Waring, the son of a clergyman, was a working soldier, a slayer, if you will, from pure love of the profession of arms, and all the while the sweetest and gentlest of men. I call him a working soldier in opposition to the parading soldier, the coxcomb in uniform, the

hero by accident, and the martial boys of wealth and station, who are of the army of England. He studied war when the trumpet slumbered, and had no place but in the field when it sounded. To him the honour of England was as a babe in his arms : he hugged it like a mother. He knew the military history of every regiment in the service. Disasters even of old date brought groans from him. This enthusiastic face was singularly soft when the large dark eyes were set musing. The cast of it being such, sometimes in speaking of a happy play of artillery upon congregated masses, an odd effect was produced. Ordinarily, the clear features were reflective almost to sadness, in the absence of animation ; but an exulting energy for action would now and then light them up. Hilarity of spirit did not belong to him. He was, nevertheless, a cheerful talker, as could be seen in the glad ear given to him by Robert. Between them it was ‘ Robert ’ and ‘ Percy.’ Robert had rescued him from drowning on the East Anglian shore, and the friendship which ensued was one chief reason for Robert’s quitting the post of trooper and buying

himself out. It was against Percy's advice, who wanted to purchase a commission for him ; but the humbler man had the sturdy scruples of his rank regarding money, and his romantic illusions being dispersed by an experience of the absolute class-distinctions in the service, Robert, that he might prevent his friend from violating them, made use of his aunt's legacy to obtain release. Since that date they had not met ; but their friendship was fast. Percy had recently paid a visit to Queen Anne's Farm, where he had seen Rhoda and heard of Robert's departure. Knowing Robert's birthplace, he had come on to Warbeach, and had seen Jonathan Eccles, who referred him to Mrs. Boulby, licensed seller of brandy, if he wished to enjoy an interview with Robert Eccles.

"The old man sent up regularly every day to inquire how his son was faring on the road to the next world," said Robert, laughing. "He's tough old English oak. I'm just to him what I appear at the time. It's better having him like that than one of your jerky fathers, who seem to belong to the stage of a theatre. Everybody

respects my old dad, and I can laugh at what he thinks of me. I've only to let him know I've served an apprenticeship in farming, and can make use of some of his ideas—sound ! every one of 'em ; every one of 'em sound ! And that I say of my own father.”

“ Why don't you tell him ?” Percy asked.

“ I want to forget all about Kent and drown the county,” said Robert. “ And I'm going to, as far as my memory's concerned.”

Percy waited for some seconds. He comprehended perfectly this state of wilfulness in an uneducated, sensitive man.

“ She has a steadfast look in her face, Robert. She doesn't look as if she trifled. I've really never seen a finer, franker girl in my life, if faces are to be trusted.”

“ It's t'other way. There's no trifling in her case. She's frank. She fires at you point blank.”

“ You never mentioned her in your letters to me, Robert.”

“ No. I had a suspicion from the first I was going to be a fool about the girl.”

Percy struck his hand.

“ You didn’t do quite right.”

“ Do you say that?”

Robert silenced him with this question, for there was a woman in Percy’s antecedent history.

The subject being dismissed, they talked more freely. Robert related the tale of Dahlia, and of his doings at Fairly.

“ Oh ! we agree,” he said, noting a curious smile that Percy could not smooth out of sight. “ I know it was odd conduct. I *do* respect my superiors ; but, believe me or not, Percy, injury done to a girl makes me mad, and I can’t hold back ; and she’s the sister of the girl you saw. By Heaven ! if it weren’t for my head getting blind now when my blood boils, I’ve the mind to walk straight up to the house and screw the secret out of one of them. What I say is—Is there a God up aloft ? Then, He sees all, and society is vapour, and while I feel the spirit in me to do it, I go straight at my aim.”

“ If, at the same time, there’s no brandy in you,” said Percy, “ which would stop your seeing clear or going straight.”

The suggestion was a cruel shock. Robert nodded. "That's true. I suppose it's my bad education that wont let me keep cool. I'm ashamed of myself afterwards. I shout and thunder, and the end of it is, I go away and think about the same of Robert Eecles that I've frightened other people into thinking. Perhaps you'll think me to blame in this case? One of those Mr. Blancoves—not the one you've heard of—struck me on the field before a lady. I bore it. It was part of what I'd gone out to meet. I was riding home late at night, and he stood at the corner of the lane, with an old enemy of mine, and a sad cur that is! Sedgett's his name—Nic, the Christian part of it! There'd just come a sharp snowfall from the north, and the moonlight shot over the flying edge of the rear-cloud; and I saw Sedgett with a stick in his hand; but the gentleman had no stick. I'll give Mr. Edward Blancove credit for not meaning to be active in a dastardly assault.

"But why was he in consultation with my enemy? And he let my enemy—by the way,

Percy, you dislike that sort of talk of ‘my enemy,’ I know. You like it put plain and simple: but down in these old parts again, I catch at old habits; and I’m always a worse man when I haven’t seen you for a time. Sedgett, say. Sedgett, as I passed, made a sweep at my horse’s knees, and took them a little over the fetlock. The beast reared. While I was holding on he swung a blow at me, and took me here.”

Robert touched his head. “I dropped like a horse-chestnut from the tree. When I recovered, I was lying in the lane. I think I was there flat, face to the ground, for half an hour, quite sensible, looking at the pretty colour of my blood on the snow. The horse was gone. I just managed to reel along to this place, where there’s always a home for me. Now, will you believe it possible? I went out next day: I saw Mr. Edward Blancove, and I might have seen a baby and felt the same to it. I didn’t know him a bit. Yesterday morning your letter was sent up from Sutton farm. Somehow, the moment I’d read it, I remembered

his face. I sent him word there was a matter to be settled between us. You think I was wrong, Percy?"

Major Waring had set a deliberately calculating eye on him.

"I want to hear more," he said.

"You think I have no claim to challenge a man in his position?"

"Answer me first, Robert. You think this Mr. Blancove helped, or instigated this man Sedgett in his attack upon you?"

"I haven't a doubt that he did."

"It's not plain evidence."

"It's good circumstantial evidence."

"At any rate, you are perhaps justified in thinking him capable of this: though the rule is, to believe nothing against a gentleman until it is flatly proved—when we drum him out of the ranks. But, if you can fancy it true, *would* you put yourself upon an equal footing with him?"

"I would," said Robert.

"Then you accept his code of morals."

"That's too shrewd for me: but men who

preach against duelling, or any kind of man-to-man in hot earnest, always fence in that way, Percy."

"I detest duelling," Major Waring remarked. "I don't like a system that permits knaves and fools to exercise a claim to imperil the lives of useful men. Let me observe, that I am not a preacher against it. I think you know my opinions; and they are not quite those of the English magistrate, and other mild persons who are wrathful at the practice upon any pretence. Keep to the other discussion. You challenge a man; you admit him your equal. But why do I argue with you? I know your mind as well as my own. You have some other idea in the background."

"I feel that he's the guilty man," said Robert.

"You feel called upon to punish him."

"No. Wait: he will not fight; but I have him and I'll hold him. I feel he's the man who has injured this girl, by every witness of facts that I can bring together; and as for the other young fellow I led such a dog's life down

here, I could beg his pardon. This one's eye met mine. I saw it wouldn't have stopped short of murder—opportunity given. Why? Because I pressed on the right spring. I'm like a woman in seeing some things. He shall repent. By —! Slap me on the face, Percy. I've taken to brandy and to swearing. Damn the girl who made me forget good lessons! Bless her heart, I mean. She saw you, did she, Percy? Did she colour when she heard your name?"

"Very much," said Major Waring.

"Was dressed in——?"

"Black, with a crimson ribbon round the collar."

Robert waved the image from his eyes.

"I'm not going to dream of her. Peace, and babies, and farming, and pride in myself with a woman by my side—there! You've seen her—all that's gone. I might as well ask the east wind to blow west. Her face is set the other way. Of course, the nature and value of a man is shown by how he takes this sort of pain; and hark at me! I'm yelling. I thought I

was cured. I looked up into the eyes of a lady ten times sweeter—when?—somewhen! I've lost dates. But here's the girl at me again. She cuddles into me—slips her hand into my breast and tugs at strings there. I can't help talking to you about her, now we've got over the first step. I'll soon give it up.

"She wore a red ribbon? If it had been spring, you'd have seen roses. Oh! what a stanch heart that girl has. Where she sets it, mind! Her life where that creature sets her heart! But, for *me*, not a penny of comfort! Now for a whole week of her, day and night, in that black dress with the coloured ribbon. On she goes: walking to church; sitting at table; looking out of the window!—

"Will you believe I thought those thick eyebrows of hers ugly once—a tremendous long time ago. Yes; but what eyes she has under them! And if she looks tender, one corner of her mouth goes quivering; and the eyes are steady, so that it looks like some wonderful bit of mercy.

"I think of that true-hearted creature praying and longing for her sister, and fearing there's shame—that's why she hates me. I wouldn't say I was certain her sister had not fallen into a pit. I couldn't. I was an idiot. I thought I wouldn't be a hypocrite. I might have said I believed as she did. There she stood ready to be taken—ready to have given herself to me, if I had only spoken a word ! It was a moment of Heaven, and God the Father could not give it to me twice ! The chance has gone.

"Oh ! what a miserable mad dog I am to gabble on in this way.—Come in ! come in, mother."

Mrs. Boulby entered, with soft footsteps, bearing a letter.

"From the Park," she said, and commenced chiding Robert gently, to establish her right to do it with solemnity.

"He will talk, sir. He's one o' them that either they talk or they hang silent, and no middle way will they take ; and the doctor's

their foe, and health they despise ; and since this cruel blow, obstinacy do seem to have been knocked like a nail into his head so fast, persuasion have not a atom o' power over him."

"There must be talking when friends meet, ma'am," said Major Waring.

"Ah!" returned the widow, "if it wouldn't be all on one side."

"I've done now, mother," said Robert.

Mrs. Boulby retired, and Robert opened the letter.

It ran thus :—

SIR,

"I am glad you have done me the favour of addressing me temperately, so that I am permitted to clear myself of an unjust and most unpleasant imputation. I will, if you please, see you, or your friend ; to whom perhaps I shall better be able to certify how unfounded is the charge you bring against me. I will call upon you at the Pilot Inn, where I hear that you are staying ; or, if you prefer it, I will attend to any appointment you may choose to

direct elsewhere. But it must be immediate, as the term of my residence in this neighbourhood is limited.

“ I am,

“ Sir,

“ Yours obediently,

“ EDWARD BLANCOVE.”

Major Waring read the lines with a critical attention.

“ It seems fair and open,” was his remark.

“ Here,” Robert struck his breast, “ here’s what answers him. What shall I do? Shall I tell him to come?”

“ Write to say that your friend will meet him at a stated place.”

Robert saw his prey escaping. “ *I’m* not to see him?”

“ No. The right is the decent way in such cases. You must leave it to me. This will be the proper method between gentlemen.”

“ It appears to my idea,” said Robert, “ that gentlemen are always, somehow, stopped from taking the straight-ahead measure.”

“ You,” Percy rejoined, “ are like a civilian before a fortress. Either he finds it so easy that he can walk into it, or he gives it up in despair as unassailable. You have followed your own devices, and what have you accomplished ?”

“ He will lie to you smoothly.”

“ Smoothly or not, if I discover that he has spoken falsely, he is answerable to me.”

“ To me, Percy.”

“ No ; to me. He can elude you ; and will be acquitted by the general verdict. But when he becomes answerable to me, his honour, in the conventional, which is here the practical, sense, is at stake, and I have him.”

“ I see that. Yes ; he can refuse to fight me,” Robert sighed. “ Hey, Lord ! it’s a heavy world when we come to methods. But will you, Percy, will you put it to him at the end of your fist—‘ Did you deceive the girl, and do you know where the girl now is ? Why, great Heaven ! we only ask to know where she is. She may have been murdered. She’s hidden from her family. Let him confess, and let him go.’ ”

Major Waring shook his head. "You see like a woman perhaps, Robert. You certainly talk like a woman. I will state your suspicions. When I have done so, I am bound to accept his reply. If we discover it to have been false, I have my remedy."

"Wont you perceive, that it isn't my object to punish him by and by, but to tear the secret out of him on the spot—now—instantly," Robert cried.

"I perceive your object, and you have experienced some of the results of your system. It's the primitive action of an appeal to the god of combats, that is exploded in these days. You have no course but to take his word."

"She said"—Robert struck his knee—"she said I should have the girl's address. She said she would see her. She pledged that to me. I'm speaking of the lady up at Fairly. Come ! things get clearer. If she knows where Dahlia is, who told her? This Mr. Algernon—not Edward Blancove—was seen with Dahlia in a box at the

play. He was there with Dahlia, yet I don't think him the guilty man. There's a finger of light upon that other."

"Who is this lady?" Major Waring asked, with lifted eyebrows.

"Mrs. Lovell."

At the name, Major Waring sat stricken.

"Lovell!" he repeated, under his breath.
"Lovell! Was she ever in India?"

"I don't know, indeed."

"Is she a widow?"

"Ay; that I've heard."

"Describe her."

Robert entered upon the task with a dozen headlong exclamations, and very justly concluded by saying that he could give no idea of her; but his friend apparently had gleaned sufficient.

Major Waring's face was touched by a strange pallor, and his smile had vanished. He ran his fingers through his hair, clutching it in a knot, as he sat eyeing the red chasm in the fire, where the light of old days and wild memories, hangs as in a crumbling world.

Robert was aware of there being a sadness in Percy's life, and that he had loved a woman and awakened from his passion. Her name was unknown to him. In that matter, his natural delicacy and his deference to Percy had always checked him from sounding the subject closely. He might be, as he had said, keen as a woman where his own instincts were in action ; but they were ineffective in guessing at the cause for Percy's sudden depression.

"She said—this lady, Mrs. Lovell, whoever she may be—she said you should have the girl's address : gave you that pledge of her word?"

Percy spoke, half meditating. "How did this happen ? When did you see her?"

Robert related the incident of his meeting with her, and her effort to be a peacemaker, but made no allusion to Mrs. Boulby's tale of the bet.

"A peacemaker !" Percy interjected. "She rides well ?"

"Best horsewoman I ever saw in my life," was Robert's ready answer.

Major Waring brushed at his forehead, as in impatience of thought.

" You must write two letters: one to this Mrs. Lovell. Say, you are about to leave the place, and remind her of her promise. It's incomprehensible; but never mind. Write that first. Then to the man. Say that your friend —by the way, this Mrs. Lovell has small hands, has she? I mean, peculiarly small? Did you notice, or not? I may know her. Never mind. Write to the man. Say—don't write down my name—say that I will meet him." Percy spoke on as in a dream. " Appoint any place and hour. To-morrow at ten, down by the river —the bridge. Write briefly. Thank him for his offer to afford you explanations. Don't argue it with me any more. Write both the letters straight off."

His back was to Robert as he uttered the injunction. Robert took pen and paper, and did as he was bidden, with all the punctilious obedience of a man who consents perforce to see a better scheme abandoned.

One effect of the equality existing between these two of diverse rank in life and perfect delicacy of heart, was, that the moment Percy assumed the lead, Robert never disputed it. Muttering simply that he was incapable of writing except when he was in a passion, he managed to produce what, in Percy's eyes, were satisfactory epistles, though Robert had horrible misgivings in regard to his letter to Mrs. Lovell—the wording of it, the cast of the sentences, even down to the character of the handwriting. These missives were despatched immediately.

"You are sure she said that?" Major Waring inquired more than once during the afternoon, and Robert assured him that Mrs. Lovell had given him her word. He grew very positive, and put it on his honour that she had said it.

"You may have heard incorrectly."

"I've got the words burning inside me," said Robert.

They walked together, before dark, to Sutton Farm, but Jonathan Eccles was abroad in his

fields, and their welcome was from Mistress Anne, whom Major Waring had not power to melt ; the moment he began speaking praise of Robert, she closed her mouth tight and crossed her wrists meekly.

" I see," said Major Waring, as they left the farm, " your aunt is of the godly, who have no forgiveness ?"

" I'm afraid so," cried Robert. " Cold blood never will come to an understanding with hot blood, and the old lady's is like frozen milk. She's right in her way, I dare say. I don't blame her. Her piety's right enough, take it as you find it."

Mrs. Boulby had a sagacious notion that gentlemen always dined well every day of their lives, and claimed that much from Providence as their due. She had exerted herself to spread a neat little repast for Major Waring, and waited on the friends herself; grieving considerably to observe that the Major failed in his duty as a gentleman, as far as the relish of eating was concerned.

"But," she said below at her bar, "he smokes the beautiful-smelling cigars, and drinks coffee made in his own way. He's very particular." Which was reckoned to be in Major Waring's favour.

The hour was near midnight when she came into the room, bearing another letter from the Park. She thumped it on the table, ruffling and making that pretence at the controlling of her bosom which precedes a feminine storm. Her indignation was caused by a communication delivered by Dick Curtis, in the parlour underneath, to the effect that Nicodemus Sedgett was not to be heard of in the neighbourhood.

Robert laughed at her, and called her Hebrew woman—eye-for-eye and tooth-for-tooth woman.

"Leave real rascals to the Lord above, mother. He's safe to punish them. They've stopped outside the chances. That's my idea. I wouldn't go out of my way to kick them—not I! It's the half-and-half villains we've got to dispose of. They're the mischief, old lady."

Percy, however, asked some questions about

Sedgett, and seemed to think his disappearance singular. He had been examining the hand-writing of the superscription to the letter. His face was flushed as he tossed it for Robert to open. Mrs. Boulby dropped her departing curtsey, and Robert read out, with odd pauses and puzzled emphasis :

“Mrs. Lovell has received the letter which Mr. Robert Eccles has addressed to her, and regrets that a misconception should have arisen from anything that was uttered during their interview. The allusions are obscure, and Mrs. Lovell can only remark, that she is pained if she at all misled Mr. Eccles in what she either spoke or promised. She is not aware that she can be of any service to him. Should such an occasion present itself, Mr. Eccles may rest assured that she will not fail to avail herself of it, and do her utmost to redeem a pledge to which he has apparently attached a meaning she can in no way account for or comprehend.”

When Robert had finished, “It’s like a female

lawyer," he said. "That woman speaking, and that woman writing, they're two different creatures—upon my soul, they are! Quick, sharp, to the point, when she speaks; and read this! Can I venture to say of a lady, she's a liar?"

"Perhaps you had better not," said Major Waring, who took the letter in his hand and seemed to study it. After which he transferred it to his pocket.

"To-morrow? To-morrow's Sunday," he observed. "We will go to church to-morrow." His eyes glittered.

"Why, I'm hardly in the mood," Robert protested. "I haven't had the habit latterly."

"Keep up the habit," said Percy. "It's a good thing for men like you."

"But what sort of a fellow am I to be showing myself there among all the people who've been talking about me—and the people up at Fairly!" Robert burst out in horror of the prospect. "I shall be a sight among the people. Percy, upon my honour, I don't think I well can. I'll read the Bible at home if you like."

"No; you'll do penance," said Major Waring.

"Are you meaning it?"

"The penance will be ten times greater on my part, believe me."

Robert fancied him to be referring to some idea of mocking the interposition of religion.

"Then we'll go to Upton church," he said.
"I don't mind it at Upton."

"I intend to go to the church attended by 'The Family,' as we say in our parts; and you must come with me to Warbeach."

Clasping one hand across his forehead, Robert cried, "You couldn't ask me to do a thing I hate so much. Go, and sit, and look sheepish, and sing hymns with the people I've been badgering; and everybody seeing me! How can it be anything to you like what it is to me?"

"You have only to take my word for it that it is, and far more," said Major Waring, sinking his voice. "Come; it wont do you any harm to make an appointment to meet your conscience now and then. You will never be ruled by reason, and your feelings have to teach you what you learn. At any rate, it's my request."

This terminated the colloquy upon that topic. Robert looked forward to a penitential Sabbath-day.

"She is a widow still," thought Major Waring, as he stood alone in his bed-room, and, drawing aside the curtains of his window, looked up at the white moon.

CHAPTER VI.

WARBEACH VILLAGE CHURCH.

WHEN the sun takes to shining in winter, and the south-west to blowing, the corners of the earth cannot hide from him—the mornings are like halls full of light. Robert had spent his hopes upon a wet day that would have kept the congregation sparse and the guests at Fairly absent from public devotions.

He perceived at once that he was doomed to be under everybody's eyes when he walked down the aisle, for everybody would attend the service on such a morning as this.

Already he had met his conscience, in so far as that he shunned asking Percy again what was the reason for their going to church, and he had not the courage to petition to go in the afternoon instead of the morning.

The question, “Are you ashamed of yourself, then?” sung in his ears as a retort ready made.

There was no help for it; so he set about assisting his ingenuity to make the best appearance possible—brushing his hat and coat with extraordinary care.

Percy got him to point out the spot designated for the meeting, and telling him to wait in the Warbeach churchyard, or within sight of it, strolled off in the direction of the river. His simple neatness and quiet gentlemanly air abashed Robert and lured him from his intense conception of abstract right and wrong which had hitherto encouraged and incited him, so that he became more than ever crest-fallen at the prospect of meeting the eyes of the church people, and with the trembling sensitiveness of a woman who weighs the merits of a lover when passion is having one of its fatal pauses, he looked at himself, and compared himself with the class of persons he had outraged, and tried to think better of himself, and to justify himself, and sturdily reject comparisons. They would not be beaten.

back. His enemies had never suggested them, but they were forced on him by the aspect of his friend.

Any man who takes the law into his own hands, and chooses to stand against what is conventionally deemed fitting :—against the world, as we say, is open to these moods of degrading humility. Robert waited for the sound of the bells with the emotions of a common culprit. Could he have been driven to the church and deposited suddenly in his pew, his mind would have been easier. It was the walking there, the walking down the aisle, the sense of his being the fellow who had matched himself against those well-attired gentlemen, which entirely confused him. And not exactly for his own sake—for Percy's partly. He sickened at the thought of being seen by Major Waring's side. His best suit and his hat were good enough, as far as they went, only he did not feel that he wore them—he could not divine how it was—with a proper air, an air of signal comfort. In fact, the graceful negligence of an English gentleman's manner had been unexpectedly revealed to

him ; and it was strange, he reflected, that Percy never appeared to observe how deficient he was, and could still treat him as an equal, call him by his Christian name, and not object to be seen with him in public.

Robert did not think at the same time that illness had impoverished his blood. Your sensational beings must keep a strong and a good flow of blood in their veins to be always on a level with the occasion which they provoke. He remembered, wonderingly, that he had used to be easy in gait and ready of wit when walking from Queen Anne's Farm to Wrexby village church. Why was he a different creature now? He could not answer the question.

Two or three of his Warbeach acquaintances passed him in the lanes. They gave him good day, and spoke kindly, and with pleasant friendly looks.

Their impression when they left him was that he was growing proud.

The jolly butcher of Warbeach, who had a hearty affection for him, insisted upon clapping his hand, and showing him to Mrs. Billing, and

showing their two young ones to Robert. With a kiss to the children, and a nod, Robert let them pass.

Here and there, he was hailed by young fellows who wore their hats on one side, and jaunty-fashioned coats—Sunday being their own bright day of exhibition. He took no notice of the greetings.

He tried to feel an interest in the robins and twittering wrens, and called to mind verses about little birds, and kept repeating them, behind a face that chilled every friendly man who knew him.

Moody the boat-builder asked him, with a stare, if he was going to church, and on Robert's replying that perhaps he was, said "I'm dashed!" and it was especially discouraging to one in Robert's condition.

Further to inspirit him, he met Jonathan Eecles, who put the same question to him, and getting the same answer, turned sharp round and walked homeward.

Robert had a great feeling of relief when the bells were silent, and sauntered with a superior composure round the holly and laurel bushes

concealing the church. Not once did he ponder on the meeting between Major Waring and Mr. Edward Blancove, until he beheld the former standing alone by the churchyard gate, and then he thought more of the empty churchyard and the absence of carriages, proclaiming the dreadful admonition that he must immediately consider as to the best way of demeaning himself before an observant and censorious congregation.

Major Waring remarked, "You are late."

"Have I kept you waiting?" said Robert.

"Not long. They are reading the lessons."

"Is it full inside?"

"I dare say it is."

"You have seen him, I suppose?"

"Oh yes; I have seen him."

Percy was short in his speech, and pale as Robert had never seen him before. He requested hastily to be told the situation of Lord Elling's pew.

"Don't you think of going into the gallery?" said Robert, but received no answer, and with an inward moan of "Good God! they'll think I've come here in a sort of repentance," he found

himself walking down the aisle ; and presently, to his amazement, settled in front of the Fairly pew, and with his eyes on Mrs. Lovell.

What was the matter with her ? Was she ill ? Robert forgot his own tribulation in an instant. Her face was like marble, and as she stood with the prayer-book in her hand, her head swayed over it : her lips made a faint effort at smiling, and she sat quietly down, and was concealed. Algernon and Sir John Capes were in the pew beside her, as well as Lady Elling, who, with a backward-turned hand and disregarding countenance, reached out her smelling-bottle.

“ Is this because she fancies I know of her having made a bet of me ? ” thought Robert, and it was not his vanity prompted the supposition, though his vanity was awakened by it. “ Or is she ashamed of her falsehood ? ” he thought again, and forgave her at the sight of her sweet pale face. The singing of the hymns made her evident suffering seem holy as a martyr’s. He scarce had the power to conduct himself reverently, so intense was his longing to show her his sympathy.

"That is Mrs. Lovell—did you see her just now?" he whispered.

"Ah?" said Major Waring.

"I'm afraid she has fainted."

"Possibly."

But Mrs. Lovell had not fainted. She rose when the time for rising came again, and fixing her eyes with a grave, devotional collectedness upon the vicar at his reading-desk, looked quite mistress of herself—but mistress of herself only when she kept them so fixed. When they moved, it was as if they had relinquished some pillar of support, and they wavered; livid shades chased her face, like the rain-clouds on a grey lake-water. Some one fronting her weighed on her eyelids. This was evident. Robert thought her a miracle of beauty. She was in colour like days he had noted thoughtfully: days with purple storm, and with golden horizon edges. She had on a bonnet of black velvet, with a delicate array of white lace, that was not suffered to disturb the contrast to her warm yellow hair. Her little gloved hands were both holding the book; at times she perused it, or, the oppression becoming

unendurable, turned her gaze towards the corner of the chancel, and thence once more to her book. Robert rejected all idea of his being in any way the cause of her strange perturbation. He cast a glance at his friend. He had begun to nourish a slight suspicion ; but it was too slight to bear up against Percy's self-possession ; for, as he understood the story, Percy had been the sufferer, and the lady had escaped without a wound. How, then, if such were the case, would she be showing emotion thus deep, while he stood before her with perfect self-command ?

Robert believed that if he might look upon that adorable face for many days together, he could thrust Rhoda's from his memory. The sermon was not long enough for him ; and he was angry with Percy for rising before there was any movement towards departure in the Fairly pew. In the doorway of the church, Percy took his arm, and asked him to point out the family tombstone. They stood by it, when Lady Elling and Mrs. Lovell came forth and walked to the carriage, receiving respectful salutes from the people of Warbeach.

"How lovely she is!" said Robert.

"Do you think her handsome?" said Major Waring.

"I can't understand such a creature dying."

Robert stepped over an open grave.

The expression of Percy's eyes was very bitter.

"I should imagine she thinks it just as impossible."

The Warbeach villagers waited for Lady Elling's carriage to roll away, and with a last glance at Robert, they too went off in gossiping groups. Robert's penance was over, and he could not refrain from asking what good his coming to church had done.

"I can't assist you," said Percy. "By the way, Mr. Blancove denies everything. He thinks you mad. He promises, now that you have adopted reasonable measures, to speak to his cousin, and help, as far as he can, to discover the address you are in search of."

"That's all?" cried Robert.

"That is all."

“Then where am I a bit farther than when I began?”

“You are only at the head of another road, and a better one.”

“Oh, why do I ever give up trusting to my right hand!” Robert muttered.

But the evening brought a note to him from Algernon Blancove. It contained a dignified condemnation of Robert’s previous insane behaviour, and closed by giving Dahlia’s address in London.

“How on earth was this brought about?” Robert now questioned.

“It’s singular, is it not?” said Major Waring; “but if you want a dog to follow you, you don’t pull it by the collar; and if you want a potatoe from the earth, you sow the potatoe before you begin digging. You are a soldier by instinct, my good Robert: your first appeal is to force. I, you see, am a civilian: I invariably try the milder methods. Do you start for London to-night? I remain. I wish to look at the neighbourhood.”

Robert postponed his journey to the morrow,

partly in dread of his approaching interview with Dahlia, but chiefly to continue a little longer by the side of him whose gracious friendship gladdened his life. They paid a second visit to Sutton Farm. Robert doggedly refused to let a word be said to his father about his having taken to farming, and Jonathan listened to all Major Waring said of his son like a man deferential to the accomplishment of speaking, but too far off to hear more than a chance word. He talked, in reply, quite cheerfully of the weather and the state of the ground; observed that the soil was his perpetual study, but he knew something of horses and dogs, and Yorkshiremen were like Jews in the trouble they took to over-reach in a bargain. "Walloping men is poor work, if you come to compare it with walloping Nature," he said, and explained that, according to his opinion, "to best a man at buying and selling was as wholesome an occupation as frowzlin' along the gutters for parings and strays." He himself preferred to go to the heart of things: "Nature makes you rich, if your object is to do the same for her. Yorkshire fellows never think

except of making themselves rich by fattening on your blood, like sheep-ticks.” In fine, Jonathan spoke sensibly, and abused Yorkshire, without hesitating to confess that a certain Yorkshireman, against whom he had matched his wits in a purchase of horseflesh, had given him a lively recollection of the encounter.

Percy asked him what he thought of his country. “I’ll tell you,” said Jonathan: “Englishmen’s business is to go to war with the elements, and so long as we fight *them*, we’re in the right academy for learnin’ how the game goes. Our vulnerability commences when we think we’ll sit down and eat the fruits, and if I don’t see signs o’ that, set me mole-tunnelling. Self-indulgence is the ruin of our time.”

This was the closest remark he made to his relations with Robert, who informed him that he was going to London on the following day. Jonathan shook his hand heartily, without troubling himself about any inquiries.

“There’s so much of that old man in me,” said Robert, when Percy praised him, on their return, “that I daren’t call him a Prince of an

old boy : and never a spot of rancour in his soul. Have a claim on him—and there's your seat at his table : take and offend him—there's your seat still. Eat and drink, but you don't get near his heart. I'll surprise him some day. He fancies he's past surprises."

" Well," said Percy, " you're younger than I am, and may think the future belongs to you."

Early next morning they parted. Robert was in town by noon. He lost no time in hurrying to the western suburb. As he neared the house where he was to believe Dahlia to be residing, he saw a man pass through the leafless black shrubs by the iron gate ; and when he came to the gate himself the man was at the door. The door opened and closed on this man. It was Nicodemus Sedgett, or Robert's eyes did him traitorous service. He knocked at the door violently, and had to knock a second and a third time. Dahlia was denied to him. He was told that Mrs. Ayrton had lived there, but had left, and her present address was unknown. He asked to be allowed to speak a word to the man who had just entered the house. No one had entered for the

last two hours, was the reply. Robert had an impulse to rush by the stolid little female liar, but Percy's recent lesson to him acted as a restraint; though, had it been a brawny woman or a lacquey in his path, he would certainly have followed his natural counsel. He turned away; lingering outside till it was dusk and the bruise on his head gave great throbs, and then he footed desolately farther and farther from the house. To combat with evil in his own country village had seemed a simple thing enough, but it appeared a superhuman task in giant London.

CHAPTER VII.

OF THE FEARFUL TEMPTATION WHICH CAME UPON
ANTHONY HACKBUT, AND OF HIS MEETING WITH
DAHLIA.

IT requires, happily, many years of an ordinary man's life to teach him to believe in the exceeding variety and quantity of things money can buy : yet, when ingenuous minds have fully comprehended the potent character of the metal, they are likely enough to suppose that it will buy everything : after which comes the groaning anxiety to possess it.

This stage of experience is a sublime development in the great souls of misers. It is their awakening moment, and it is their first real sense of a harvest being in their hands. They have begun under the influence of the passion for hoarding, which is but a blind passion of the finger-ends.

The idea that they have got together, bit by bit, a power, travels slowly up to their heavy brains. Once let it be grasped, however, and they clutch a god. They feed on everybody's hunger for it. And, let us confess, they have in that a mighty feast.

Anthony Hackbut was not a miser. He was merely a saving old man. His vanity was, to be thought a miser, envied as a miser. He lived in daily hearing of the sweet chink of gold, and loved the sound, but with a poetical love, rather than with the sordid desire to amass gold pieces. Though a saving old man, he had his comforts ; and if they haunted him and reproached him subsequently, for indulging wayward appetites for herrings and whelks and other sea-dainties that render up no account to you when they have disappeared, he put by copper and silver continually, weekly and monthly, and was master of a sum.

He knew the breadth of this sum with accuracy, and what it would expand to this day come a year, and probably this day come five years. He knew it only too well. The sum took no grand leaps. It increased, but did not

seem to multiply. And he was breathing in the heart of the place, of all places in the world, where money did multiply.

He was the possessor of twelve hundred pounds, solid, and in haven ; that is, the greater part in the Bank of England, and a portion in Boyne's Bank. He had besides a few skirmishing securities, and some such bits of paper as Algernon had given him in the public-house on that remarkable night of his visit to the theatre.

These, when the borrowers were defaulters in their payments and pleaded for an extension of time, inspired him with sentiments of grandeur that the solid property could not impart. Nevertheless, the anti-poetical tendency within him which warred with the poetical, and set him reducing whatsoever he claimed to plain figures, made it but a fitful hour of satisfaction.

He had only to fix his mind upon Farmer Fleming's conception of his wealth, to feel the miserable smallness of what was legitimately his own ; and he felt it with so poignant an emotion that at times his fears of death were excited by

the knowledge of a dead man's impotence to suggest hazy margins in the final exposure of his property. There it would lie, dead as himself ! contracted, coffined, contemptible !

What would the farmer think when he came to hear that his brother Tony's estate was not able to buy up Queen Anne's Farm ?—when, in point of fact, he found that he had all along been the richer man of the two !

Anthony's comfort was in the unfaltering strength of his constitution. He permitted his estimate of it to hint at the probability of his outlasting his brother William John, to whom he wished no earthly ill, but only that he should not live with a mitigated veneration for him. He was really nourished by the farmer's gluttonous delight in his supposed piles of wealth. Sometimes, for weeks, he had the gift of thinking himself one of the Bank with which he had been so long connected ; and afterwards a wretched reaction set in.

It was then that his touch upon Bank money began to intoxicate him strangely. He had at times thousands hugged against his bosom, and

his heart swelled to the money-bags immense. He was a dispirited, but a grateful creature, after he had delivered them up. The delirium came by fits, as if a devil lurked to surprise him.

"With this money," said the demon, "you might speculate, and in two days make ten times the amount."

To which Anthony answered : "My character's worth fifty times the amount."

Such was his reply, but he did not think it. He was honest, and his honesty had become a habit ; but the money was the only thing which acted on his imagination ; his character had attained to no sacred halo, and was just worth his annual income and the respect of the law for his person. The money fired his brain.

"Ah ! if it *was* mine !" he sighed. "If I could call it mine for just forty or fifty hours ! But it ain't, and I can't."

He fought dogged battles with the tempter, and beat him off again and again. One day he made a truce with him by saying that if ever the farmer should be in town of an afternoon he would steal ten minutes or so, and make an

appointment with him somewhere and show him the money-bags without a word : let him weigh, and eye, and plunge his hand in : and then the plan was for Anthony to pocket them and talk of polities, while the farmer's mind was in a ferment.

With this arrangement the infernal Power appeared to be content, and Anthony was temporarily relieved of his trouble. In other words, the intermittent fever of a sort of harmless rascality was afflicting this old creature. He never entertained the notion of running clear away with the money entrusted to him.

Whither could an aged man fly ? He thought of foreign places as of spots that gave him a shivering sense of its being necessary for him to be born again in nakedness and helplessness, if ever he was to see them and set foot on them.

London was his home, and clothed him about warmly and honourably, and so he said to the demon in their next colloquy.

Anthony had become guilty of the imprudence of admitting him to conferences and arguing with him upon equal terms. They tell us, that this is the imprudence of women under temptation ;

and perhaps Anthony was pushed to the verge of the abyss from causes somewhat similar to those which imperil them, and employed the same kind of efforts in his resistance :—*Sauf notre respect pour le beau sexe, bien entendu.*

In consequence of this compromise, the demon by degrees took seat at his breakfast-table, when Mrs. Wicklow, his landlady, could hear Anthony talking in the tone of voice of one who was pushed to his sturdiest arguments. She conceived that the old man's head was softening.

He was making one of his hurried rushes with the portage of money on an afternoon in Spring, when a young female plucked at his coat, and his wrath at offenders against the law kindled in a minute into fury.

"Hands off, minx!" he cried. "You shall be given in charge. Where's a policeman?"

"Uncle!" she said.

"You precious swindler in petticoats!" Anthony fumed.

But he had a queer recollection of her face, and when she repeated piteously: "Uncle!" he peered at her features, saying—

"No!" in wonderment, several times.

Her hair was cut like a boy's. She was in common garments, with a close-shaped skull-cap and a black straw bonnet on her head; not gloved, of ill complexion, and with deep dark lines slanting down from the corners of her eyes. Yet the inspection convinced him that he beheld Dahlia, his niece. He was amazed; but speedily remembering the priceless trust in his arms, and the wickedness of the streets, he bade her follow him. She did so with some difficulty, for he ran, and dodged, and treated the world as his enemy, suddenly vanished, and appeared again breathing freely.

"Why, my girl?" he said: "why, Dahl—
Mrs. What's-your-name? Why, who'd have
known you? Is that"—he got his eyes close
to her hair; "is that the ladies' fashion now?
'Cause, if it is, our young street scamps has
only got to buy bonnets, and—I say, you
don't look the Pomp. Not as you used to,
Miss — Ma'am, I mean—no, that you
don't. Well, what's the news? How's your
husband?"

"Uncle," said Dahlia; "will you, please, let me speak to you somewhere?"

"Ain't we standing together?"

"Oh! pray, out of the crowd!"

"Come home with me, if my lodgings ain't too poor for you," said Anthony.

"Uncle, I can't. I have been unwell. I cannot walk far. Will you take me to some quiet place?"

"Will you treat me to a cab?" Anthony sneered vehemently.

"I have left off riding, uncle."

"What! Hulloa!" Anthony sang out. "Cash is down in the mouth at home, is it? Tell me that, now!"

Dahlia dropped her eyelids, and then entreated him once more to conduct her to a quiet place where they might sit together, away from noise. She was very earnest and very sad, not seeming to have much strength.

"Do you mind taking my arm?" said Anthony.

She leaned her hand on his arm, and he dived

across the road with her, among omnibuses and cabs, shouting to them through the roar—

“ We’re the Independence on two legs, warranted sound, and no competition ;” and saying to Dahlia : “ Lor’ bless you ! there’s no retort in ’em, or I’d say something worth hearing. It’s like poking lions in cages with raw meat, afore you get a chaffing-match out o’ them. Some of ’em know me. They’d be good at it, those fellows. I’ve heard of good things said by ’em. But there they sit, and they’ve got no circulation —ain’t ready, except at old women, or when they catch you in a mess, and getting the worst of it. Let me tell you, you’ll never get manly chaff out of big bundles o’ fellows with ne’er an atom o’ circulation. The river’s the place for that. I’ve heard uncommon good things on the river—not *of* ’em, but *heard* ’em. T’other’s most part invention. And, they tell me, horse-back’s a prime thing for chaff. Circulation, again. Sharp and lively, I mean ; not bawl, and answer over your back—most part impudence, and nothing else—and then out of hearing.

That sort o' chaff's cowardly. Boys are stiff young parties—circulation—and I don't tackle them pretty often, 'xcept when I'm going like a ball among nine-pins. It's all a matter o' circulation. I say, my dear," Anthony addressed her seriously, "you should never lay hold o' my arm when you see me going my pace of an afternoon. I took you for a thief, and worse—I did. That I did. Had you been waiting to see me?"

"A little," Dahlia replied, breathless.

"You *have* been ill?"

"A little," she said.

"You've written to the farm? O' course you have!"

"Oh! uncle, wait," moaned Dahlia.

"But, ha' you been sick, and not written home?"

"Wait; please, wait," she entreated him.

"I'll wait," said Anthony; "but that's no improvement to queerness; and 'queer's' your motto. Now we cross London Bridge. There's the Tower that lived in times when no man was safe of keeping his own money, 'cause of

grasping kings—all claws and crown. I'm Republican as far as 'none o' them'—goes. There's the ships. The sun rises behind 'em, and sets afore 'em, and you may fancy, if you like, there's always gold in their rigging. Gals o' your sort think——I say, come! tell me, if you *are* a lady?"

"No, uncle, no!" Dahlia cried, and then drawing in her breath, added: "not to you."

"Last time I crossed this bridge with a young woman hanging on my arm, it was your sister; they say she called on you, and you wouldn't see her; and a gal so good and a gal so true ain't to be got for a sister every day in the year! What are you pulling me for?"

Dahlia said nothing, but clung to him with a drooping head, and so they hurried along, until Anthony stopped in front of a shop displaying cups and muffins at the window, and leprous-looking strips of bacon, and sausages that had angled for appetites till they had become pallid, sodden things, like washed-out bait.

Into this shop he led her, and they took possession of a compartment, and ordered tea and muffins.

The shop was empty.

"It's one of the expenses of relationship," Anthony sighed, after probing Dahlia unsatisfactorily to see whether she intended to pay for both, or at least for herself; and finding that she had no pride at all. "My sister marries your father, and, in consequence—well! a muffin now and then ain't so very much. We'll forget it, though it *is* a breach, mind, in counting up afterwards, and twopences every day's equal to a good big cannon ball in the castle-wall at the end of the year. Have you written home?"

Dahlia's face showed the bright anguish of unshed tears.

"Uncle—oh! speak low. I have been near death. I have been ill for so long a time. I have come to you to hear about them—my father and Rhoda. Tell me what they are doing, and do they sleep and eat well, and are not in trouble? I could not write. I was helpless. I could not

hold a pen. Be kind, dear uncle, and do not reproach me. Please, tell me that they have not been sorrowful."

A keenness shot from Anthony's eyes. "Then, where's your husband?" he asked.

She made a sad attempt at smiling. "He is abroad."

"How about his relatives? Ain't there one among 'em to write for you when you're ill?"

"He . . . Yes, he has relatives. I could not ask them. Oh! I am not strong, uncle; if you will only leave following me so with questions; but tell me, tell me what I want to know."

"Well, then, you tell me where your husband banks," returned Anthony.

"Indeed, I cannot say."

"Do you," Anthony stretched out alternative fingers, "do you get money from him to make payments in gold, or, do you get it in paper?"

She stared as in terror of a pit-fall. "Paper," she said at a venture.

"Well, then, name your Bank."

There was no cunning in her eye as she

answered : " I don't know any bank, except the Bank of England."

" Why the deuce didn't you say so at once—eh ?" cried Anthony. " He gives you bank-notes. Nothing better in the world. And he an't been givin' you many lately—is that it ? What's his profession, or business ?"

" He is . . . he is no profession."

" Then, what is he ? Is he a gentleman ?"

" Yes," she breathed plaintively.

" Your husband's a gentleman. Eh ?—and lost his money ?"

" Yes."

" How did he lose it ?"

The poor victim of this pertinacious interrogatory now beat about within herself for succour. " I must not say," she replied.

" You're going to try to keep a secret, are ye ?" said Anthony ; and she, in her relief at the pause to her torment, said : " I am," with a little infantine, withering half-smile.

" Well, you've been and kept *yourself* pretty secret," the old man pursued. " I suppose your husband's proud ? He's proud, ain't he ? He's

of a family, I'll be bound. Is he of a family? How did he like your dressing up like a mill'ner gal to come down in the city and see me?"

Dahlia's guile was not ready. "He didn't mind," she said.

"He didn't mind, didn't he? He don't mind your cutting of your hair so?—didn't mind that?"

She shook her head. "No."

Anthony was down upon her like a hawk.

"Why, he's abroad!"

"Yes; I mean, he did not see me."

With which, in a minute, she was out of his grasp; but her heart beat thick, her lips were dry, and her thoughts were in disorder.

"Then, he don't know you've been and got shaved, and a poll like a turnip-head of a thief? That's something for him to learn, is it?"

The picture of her beauty gone, seared her eyes like heated brass. She caught Anthony's arm with one firm hand to hold him silent, and with the other hand covered her sight and let the fit of weeping pass.

When the tears had spent themselves, she

relinquished her hold of the astonished old man, who leaned over the table to her, and dominated by the spirit of her touch, whispered, like one who had accepted a bond of secrecy : “ Th’ old farmer’s well. So’s Rhoda—my darkie lass. They’ve taken on a bit. And then they took to religion for comfort. Th’ old farmer attends Methody meetin’s, and quotes Scriptur’ as if he was fixed like a pump to the book, and couldn’t fetch a breath without quotin’. Rhoda’s oftenest along with your rector’s wife down there, and does works o’ charity, sick-nussin’, readin’—old farmer does the preachin’. Old mother Sumfit’s fat as ever, and says her money’s for you: Old Gammon goes on eatin’ of the dumplins. Hey ! what a queer old ancient he is. He seems to me to belong to a time afore ever money was. That Mr. Robert’s off . . . never been down there since he left, ’cause my darkie lass thought herself too good for him. So she is !—too good for anybody. They’re going to leave the farm ; sell, and come to London.”

“ Oh, no !” exclaimed Dahlia ; “ not going to leave the dear old farm, and our lane, and the old

oaks, leading up to the heath. Are they? Father will miss it. Rhoda will mourn so. No place will ever be like that to them. I love it better than any place on earth."

"That's queer," said Anthony. "Why do you refuse to go, or wont let your husband take you down there; if you like the place that raving-like? But queer's your motto. The truth is this—you just listen. Hear me—hush! I wont speak in a bawl. You're a reasonable being, and you don't—that's to say, you do understand, the old farmer feels it uncomfortable—"

"But I never helped him when I was there," said Dahlia, suddenly shrinking in a perceptible tremble of acute divination. "I was no use. I never helped him—not at all. I was no—no use!"

Anthony blinked his eyes, not knowing how it was that he had thus been thrown out of his direct road. He began again, in his circumlocutory delicacy: "Never mind; help or no help, what th' old farmer feels is—and quite nat'r'al. There's sensations as a father, and sensations as a man; and what th' old farmer feels—"

"But Rhoda has always been more to father than I have," Dahlia cried, now stretching forward with desperate courage to confront her uncle, distract his speech, and avert the saying of the horrible thing she dreaded. "Rhoda was everything to him. Mother perhaps took to me —my mother!"

The line of her long underlip drawn sharp to check her tears, stopped her speaking.

"All very well about Rhoda," said Anthony. "She's everything to me, too."

"Every—everybody loves her!" Dahlia took him up.

"Let 'em, so long as they don't do no harm to her," was Anthony's remark. There was an idea in this that he had said, and the light of it led off his fancy. It was some time before he returned to the attack.

"Neighbours gossip a good deal. O' course you know that."

"I never listen to them," said Dahlia, who now felt bare at any instant for the stab she saw coming.

"No, not in London; but country's different, and a man hearing of his child—'it's very odd!'

and ‘keepin’ away like that!’ and ‘what’s become of her?’ and that sort of thing, he gets upset.”

Dahlia swallowed in her throat, as in perfect quietude of spirit, and pretended to see no meaning for herself in Anthony’s words.

But she said, inadvertently, “Dear father!” and it gave Anthony his opening.

“There it is. No doubt you’re fond of him. You’re fond o’ th’ old farmer, who’s your father. Then, why not make a entry into the village, and show ’em? I loves my father, says you. I can or I can’t bring my husband, you seems to say; but I’m come to see my old father. Will you go down to-morrow wi’ me?”

“Oh!” Dahlia recoiled and abandoned all defence in a moan: “I can’t—I can’t!”

“There,” said Anthony, “you can’t. You confess you can’t; and there’s reason for what’s in your father’s mind. And he hearin’ neighbours’ gossip, and it comes to him by a sort of extractin’—‘Where’s her husband?’ bein’ the question; and ‘She ain’t got one,’ the answer—it’s nat’ral for him to leave the place. I never

can tell him how you went off, or who's the man, lucky or not. You went off sudden, on a morning, after kissin' me at breakfast ; and no more Dahly visible. And he suspects—he more'n suspects. Farm's up for sale. Th' old farmer thinks it's unbrotherly of me not to go and buy, and I can't make him see I don't understand land : it's about like changing sovereigns for lumps o' clay, in my notions ; and that ain't my taste. Long and the short is—people down there at Wrexby and all round say you ain't married. He ain't got a answer for 'em ; it's cruel to hear, and crueller to think : he's got no answer, poor old farmer ! and he's obliged to go inter exile. Farm's up for sale.”

Anthony thumped with his foot conclusively.

“ Say I'm not married !” said Dahlia, and a bad colour flushed her countenance. “ They say—I'm not married. I am—I am. It's false. It's cruel of father to listen to them—wicked people ! base—base people ! I am married, uncle. Tell father so, and don't let him sell the farm. Tell him, I said I was married. I am. I'm respected.

I have only a little trouble, and I'm sure others have too. We all have. Tell father not to leave. It breaks my heart. Oh ! uncle, tell him that from me."

Dahlia gathered her shawl close, and set an irresolute hand upon her bonnet strings, that moved as if it had forgotten its purpose. She could say no more. She could only watch her uncle's face, to mark the effect of what she had said.

Anthony nodded at vacancy. His eyebrows were up, and did not descend from their elevation. " You see, your father wants assurances ; he wants facts. They're easy to give, if give 'em you can. Ah, there's a weddin' ring on your finger, sure enough. Plain gold—and, Lord ! how bony your fingers ha' got, Dahly. If you are a sinner, you're a bony one now, and that don't seem so bad to me. *I* don't accuse you, my dear. Perhaps I'd like to see your husband's banker's book. But what your father hears, is— You've gone wrong."

Dahlia smiled in a consummate simulation of scorn.

" And your father thinks that's true."

She smiled with an equal simulation of saddest pity.

"And he says this: 'Proof,' he says, 'proof's what I want, that she's an honest woman.' He asks for you to clear yourself. He says, 'It's hard for an old man'—these are his words—'it's hard for an old man to hear his daughter called'"

Anthony smacked his hand tight on his open mouth.

He was guiltless of any intended cruelty, and Dahlia's first impulse when she had got her breath, was to soothe him. She took his hand. "Dear father! poor father! Dear, dear father!" she kept saying.

"Rhoda don't think it," Anthony assured her.

"No?" and Dahlia's bosom exulted up to higher pain.

"Rhoda declares you *are* married. To hear that gal fight for you—; there's ne'er a one in Wrexby dares so much as hint a word within a mile of her."

"My Rhoda! my sister!" Dahlia gasped, and the tears came pouring down her face.

In vain Anthony lifted her tea-cup and the muffin-plate to her for consolation. His hushings and soothings were louder than her weeping. Incapable of resisting such a protest of innocence, he said, "And I don't think it, neither."

She pressed his fingers, and begged him to pay the people of the shop : at which sign of her being probably moneyless, Anthony could not help mumbling, "Though I can't make out about your husband, and why he lets ye be cropped—that he can't help, may be—but lets ye go about dressed like a mill'ner gal, and not afford cabs. Is he very poor?"

She bowed her head.

"*Poor?*"

"He is very poor."

"Is he, or ain't he, a gentleman?"

Dahlia seemed torn by a new anguish.

"I see," said Anthony. "He goes and persuades you he is, and you've been and found out he's nothin' o' the sort—eh? That 'd be a way of accounting for your queerness, more or less. Was it that fellow that Wicklow's gal saw ye with?"

Dahlia signified vehemently, "No."

"Then, I've guessed right; he turns out not to be a gentleman—ch, Dahly? Go on noddin', if ye like. Never mind the shop people; we're well-conducted, and that's all they care for. I say, Dahly, he ain't a gentleman? You speak out or nod your head. You thought you'd caught a gentleman and 'taint the case. Gentlemen ain't caught so easy. They all of 'em goes to school, and that makes 'em knowin'. Come; he ain't a gentleman?"

Dahlia's voice issued, from a terrible inward conflict, like a voice of the tombs. "No," she said.

"Then, will you show him to me? Let me have a look at him."

Pushed from misery to misery, she struggled within herself again, and again in the same hollow manner said, "Yes."

"You will?"

"Yes."

"Seein's believin'. If you'll show him to me, or me to him . . . ?"

"Oh ! don't talk of it." Dahlia struck her fingers in a tight lock.

"I only want to set eye on him, my gal. Whereabouts does he live?"

"Down—down a great—very great way in the west."

Anthony stared.

She replied to the look: "In the west of London—a long way down."

"That's where he is?"

"Yes."

"I thought——hum!" went the old man suspiciously. "When am I to see him? Some day?"

"Yes ; some day."

"Didn't I say, *Sunday?*"

"*Next Sunday?*" — Dahlia gave a muffled cry.

"Yes, next Sunday. Day after to-morrow. And I'll write off to-morrow, and ease th' old farmer's heart, and Rhoda 'll be proud for you. *She* don't care about gentleman—or no gentleman. More do th' old farmer. It's let us live and die respectable, and not disgrace father nor

mother. Old-fashioned's best-fashioned about them things, I think. Come—you bring him—your husband—to me on Sunday, if you object to my callin' on you. Make up your mind to."

"Not next Sunday—the Sunday after," Dahlia pleaded. "He is not here now."

"Where is he?" Anthony asked.

"He's in the country."

Anthony pounced on her, as he had done previously.

"You said to me he was abroad."

"In the country—abroad. Not—not in the great cities. I could not make known your wishes to him."

She gave this cool explanation with her eyelids fluttering timorously, and rose as she uttered it, but with faint and ill-supporting limbs, for during the past hour she had gone through the sharpest trial of her life, and had decided for the course of her life. Anthony was witless thereof, and was mystified by his incapability of perceiving where and how he had been deluded; but as he had eaten all the muffin on

the plate, and her rising proclaimed that she had no intention of making him call for another; which was satisfactory. He drank off her cup of tea at a gulp.

The waitress named the sum he was to pay, and receiving a meditative look in return for her air of expectaney after the amount had been laid on the table, at once accelerated their passage from the shop by opening the door.

“If ever I did give pennies, I’d give ‘em to you,” said Anthony, when he was out of her hearing. “Women beat men in guessing at a man by his face. Says she—you’re honourable—you’re legal—but prodigal ain’t your portion. That’s what she says, without the words, unless she’s a reader. Now, then, Dahly, my lass, you take my arm. Buckle to. We’ll to the west. Don’t th’ old farmer pronounce like ‘toe’ the west? We’ll ‘toe’ the west. I can afford to laugh at them big houses up there.”

“Where’s the foundation, if one of them’s sound? Why, in the City.

“I’ll take you by our governor’s house. You know— you know— don’t ye, Dahly, know

we been suspecting his nephew? 'cause we saw him with you at the theatre.

"*I* didn't suspect. *I knew* he found you there by chance, somehow. And I noticed your dress there. No wonder your husband's poor. He wanted to make you cut a figure as one of the handssomes, and that's as ruinous as cabs—ha! ha!"

Anthony laughed, but did not reveal what had struck him.

"Sir William Blancove's house is a first-rater. I've been in it. He lives in the library. All the other rooms—enter 'em, and if 'tain't like a sort of a social sepulchre! Dashed if he can get his son to live with him; though they're friends, and his son 'll get all the money, and go into Parliament, and cut a shine, never fear."

"*By* the way, I've seen Robert, too. He called on me at the Bank. Asked after you.

"' Seen her?' says he.

"' No,' I says.

"' Ever see Mr. Edward Blancove here?' he says.

"I told him, I'd heard say, Mr. Edward was

Continentalling. And then Robert goes off. His opinion is you ain't in England; 'cause a policeman he spoke to can't find you nowhere.

"'Come,' says I, 'let's keep our detectives to catch thieves, and not go distracting of 'em about a parcel o' women.'

"He's awfully down about Rhoda. She might do worse than take him. I don't think he's got a ounce of a chance now Religion's set in, though he's the mildest big 'un I ever come across. I forgot to haul him over about what he'd got to say about Mr. Edward. I did remark, I thought—ain't I right?—Mr. Algernon's not the man—eh? How come you in the theatre with him?"

Dahlia spoke huskily. "He saw me. He had seen me at home. It was an accident."

"Exactly how I put it to Robert. And he agreed with me. There's sense in that young man. Your husband wouldn't let you come to us there—eh? because he why was that?"

Dahlia had it on her lips to say it—"Because he was poorer than I thought;" but in the in-

tensity of her torment, the wretchedness of this lie, revolted her. "Oh ! for God's sake, uncle, give me peace about that."

The old man murmured : "Ay, ay ;" and thought it natural that she should shun an allusion to the circumstance.

They crossed one of the bridges, and Dahlia stopped and said : "Kiss me, uncle."

"I ain't ashamed," said Anthony.

This being over, she insisted on his not accompanying her farther.

Anthony made her pledge her word of honour as a married woman, to bring her husband to the identical spot where they stood at three o'clock in the afternoon of Sunday week. She promised it.

"I'll write home to th' old farmer—a penny," said Anthony, showing that he had considered the outlay and was prepared for it.

"And, uncle," she stipulated in turn, "they are not to see me yet. Very soon ; but not yet. Be true to me, and come alone, or it will be your fault—I shall not appear. Now, mind. And beg them not to leave the farm. It will kill

father. Can you not," she said, in the faded sweetness of her speech, "could you not buy it, and let father be your tenant, uncle? He would pay you regularly."

Anthony turned a rough shoulder on her.

"Good-by, Dahly. You be a good girl, and all 'll go right. Old farmer talks about praying. If he didn't make it look so dark to a chap, I'd be ready to fancy something in that. You try it. You try, Dahly. Say a bit of a prayer to-night."

"I pray every night," Dahlia answered.

Her look of meek despair was hauntingly sad with Anthony on his way home.

He tracked her sorrowfulness to the want of money; and another of his terrific vague struggles with the money-demon set in.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE PARK.

SIR WILLIAM BLANCOVE did business at his Bank till the hour of three in the afternoon, when his carriage conveyed him to a mews near the park of Fashion, where he mounted horse and obeyed the bidding of his doctor for a space, by cantering in a pleasant, portly, cock-horsey style, up and down the Row.

It was the day of the great race on Epsom Downs, and elderly gentlemen pricked by the doctors were in the ascendant in all London congregations on horseback.

Like Achilles (if the bilious shade will permit the impudent comparison), they dragged their enemy, Gout, at their horses' heels for a term, and vengeance being accomplished (here the com-

parison humanely ceases) went to their dinners and revived him.

Sir William was disturbed by his son's absence from England. A youth to whom a baronetcy and wealth are to be bequeathed is an important organism ; and Sir William, though his faith reposed in his son, was averse to his inexplicably prolonged residence in the French metropolis, which, though a school for many things, is not a school for the study of our Parliamentary system, and still less for that connubial career Sir William wished him to commence.

Edward's delightful cynical wit, the worldly man's profundity, and his apt quotations of the wit of others, would have continued to exercise their charm, if Sir William had not wanted to have him on the spot that he might answer certain questions pertinaciously put by Mamma Gosling on behalf of her daughter.

"There is no engagement," Edward wrote ; "let the maiden wait and discern her choice : let her ripen ;" and he quoted Horace up to a point.

Nor could his father help smiling and com-

pleting the lines. He laughed, too, as he read the jog of a verse: "Were I to marry the Gosling, pray, which would be the goose?"

He laughed, but with a shade of disappointment in the fancy that he perceived a wearing away of the robust mental energy which had characterized his son: and Sir William knew the danger of wit, and how the sharp blade cuts the shoots of the sapling. He had thought that Edward was veritable, tough oak, and had hitherto encouraged his light play with the weapon.

It became a question with him now, whether Wit and Ambition may dwell together harmoniously in a young man: whether they will not give such manifestation of their social habits as two robins shut in a cage will do: of which pretty birds one will presently be discovered with a slightly ruffled bosom amid the feathers of his defunct associate.

Thus painfully revolving matters of fact and feeling, Sir William cantered, and, like a cropped billow blown against by the wind, drew up in

front of Mrs. Lovell, and entered into conversation with that lady, for the fine needles of whose brain he had the perfect deference of an experienced senior. She, however, did not give him comfort. She informed him that something was wrong with Edward ; she could not tell what. She spoke of him languidly, as if his letters contained wearisome trifling.

“ He strains to be Frenchy,” she said. “ It may be a good compliment for them to receive : it’s a bad one for him to pay.”

“ Alcibiades is not the best of models,” murmured Sir William. “ He doesn’t mention Miss Gosling ?”

“ Oh dear, yes. I have a French acrostic on her name.”

“ An acrostic !”

A more contemptible form of mental exercise was not to be found, according to Sir William’s judgment.

“ An acrostic !” he made it guttural. “ Well !”

“ He writes word that he hears Molière every other night. That can’t harm him. His reading is principally Memoirs, which I think I have

heard you call ‘The backstairs of history.’ We are dull here, and I should not imagine it to be a healthy place to dwell in, if the absence of friends and the presence of sunshine conspire to dullness. Algy, of course, is deep in accounts to-day?”

Sir William remarked that he had not seen the young man at the office, and had not looked for him; but the mention of Algernon brought something to his mind, and he said :

“I hear he is continually sending messengers from the office to you during the day. You rule him with a rod of iron. Make him discontinue that practice. I hear that he despatched our old porter to you yesterday with a letter marked ‘urgent.’”

Mrs. Lovell laughed pleadingly for Algernon.

“No; he shall not do it again. It occurred yesterday, and on no other occasion that I am aware of. He presumes that I am as excited as he is himself about the race —.”

The lady bowed to a passing cavalier; a smarting blush dyed her face.

“He bets, does he!” said Sir William. “A

young man, whose income, at the extreme limit, is two hundred pounds a year."

"May not the smallness of the amount in some degree account for the betting?" she asked whimsically. "You know, I bet a little—just a little. If I have but a small sum, I already regard it as a stake; I am tempted to bid it fly."

"In his case, such conduct puts him on the high road to rascality," said Sir William, severely. "He is doing no good."

"Then the Squire is answerable for such conduct, I think."

"You presume to say that he is so because he allows his son very little money to squander? How many young men have to contain their expenses within two hundred pounds a-year!"

"Not sons of squires and nephews of baronets," said Mrs. Lovell. "Adieu! I think I see a carrier-pigeon flying overhead, and, as you may suppose, I am all anxiety."

Sir William nodded to her. He disliked certain of her ways; but they were transparent bits

of audacity and restlessness pertaining to a youthful widow, full of natural dash ; and she was so sweetly mistress of herself in all she did, that he never supposed her to be needing caution against excesses. Old gentlemen have their pets, and Mrs. Lovell was a pet of Sir William's.

She was on the present occasion quite mistress of herself, though the stake was large. She was mistress of herself when Lord Suckling, who had driven from the Downs and brushed all save a spot of white dust out of his baby moustache to make himself presentable, rode up to her to say that the horse Templemore was beaten, and that his sagacity in always betting against favourites would, in this last instance, transfer a ‘pot of money’ from alien pockets to his own.

“Algy Blancove’s in for five hundred to me,” he said ; adding with energy, “I hope you haven’t lost? No, don’t go and dash my jolly feeling by saying you have. It was a fine heat ; neck-and-neck past the stand. Have you?”

“A little,” she confessed. “It’s a failing of mine to like favourites. I’m sorry for Algy.”

“ I’m afraid he’s awfully bitten.”

“ What makes you think so?”

“ He took it so awfully cool.”

“ That may mean the reverse.”

“ It don’t with him. But, Mrs. Lovell, do tell me you haven’t lost. Not much, is it? Because, I know there’s no guessing, when you are concerned.”

The lady trifled with her bridle-rein.

“ I really can’t tell you yet. I may have lost. I haven’t won. I’m not cool-blooded enough to bet against favourites. *Addio*, son of Fortune! I’m at the Opera to-night.”

As she turned her horse from Lord Suckling, the cavalier who had saluted her when she was with Sir William passed again. She made a signal to her groom, and sent the man flying in pursuit of him, while she turned and cantered. She was soon overtaken.

“ Madam, you have done me the honour.”

“ I wish to know why it is your pleasure to avoid me, Major Waring?”

“ In this place?”

“ Wherever we may chance to meet.”

"I must protest."

"Do not. The thing is evident."

They rode together silently.

Her face was towards the sunset. The light smote her yellow hair, and struck out her grave and offended look, as in a picture.

"To be condemned without a hearing!" she said. "The most dastardly criminal gets that. Is it imagined that I have no common feelings? Is it manly to follow me with studied insult? I can bear the hatred of fools. Contempt, I have not deserved. Dead! I should be dead, if my conscience had once reproached me. I am a mark for slander, and brave men should beware of herding with despicable slanderers."

She spoke, gazing frontwards all the while. The pace she maintained in no degree impeded the concentrated passion of her utterance.

But it was a more difficult task for him, going at that pace, to make explanations, and she was exquisitely fair to behold! The falling beams touched her with a mellow sweetness that kindled bleeding memories.

"If I defend myself?" he said.

"No. All I ask is that you should accuse me. Let me know what I have done—done, that I have not been bitterly punished for? What is it? what is it? Why do you inflict a torture on me whenever you see me? Not by word, not by look. You are too subtle in your cruelty to give me anything I can grasp. You know how you wound me. And I am alone."

"That is supposed to account for my behaviour?"

She turned her face to him. "Oh, Major Waring! say nothing unworthy of yourself. That would be a new pain to me."

He bowed. In spite of a prepossessing anger, some little softness crept through his heart.

"You may conceive that I have dropped my pride," she said. "That is the case, or my pride is of a better sort."

"Madam, I fully hope and trust," said he.

"And believe," she added, twisting his words to the ironic tongue. "You certainly must believe that my pride has sunk low. Did I ever speak to you in this manner before?"

"Not in this manner, I can attest."

"Did I speak at all, when I was hurt?" She betrayed that he had planted a fresh sting.

"If my recollection serves me," said he, "your self-command was remarkable."

Mrs. Lovell slackened her pace.

"Your recollection serves you too well, Major Waring. I was a girl. You judged the acts of a woman. I was a girl, and you chose to put your own interpretation on whatever I did. You scourged me before the whole army. Was not that enough? I mean, enough for you? For me, perhaps not, for I have suffered since, and may have been set apart to suffer. I saw you in that little church at Warbeach; I met you in the lanes; I met you on the steamer; on the railway platform; at the review. Everywhere you kept up the look of my judge. You!—and I have been 'Margaret' to you. Major Waring, how many a woman in my place would attribute your relentless condemnation of her to injured vanity or vengeance? In those days I trifled with everybody. I played with fire. I was ignorant of life. I was true to my husband; and because I

was true, and because I was ignorant, I was plunged into tragedies I never suspected. This is to be what you call a coquette. Stamping a name saves thinking. Could I read my husband's temper? Would not a coquette have played her cards differently? There never was need for me to push my husband to a contest. I never had the power to restrain him. Now I am wiser; and now is too late; and now you sit in judgment on me. Why? It is not fair; it is unkind."

Tears were in the voice, though not in her eyes.

Major Waring tried to study her with the coolness of a man who has learnt to doubt the truth of women; but he had once yearned in a young man's frenzy of love to take that delicate shape in his arms, and he was not proof against the sedate sweet face and keen, sad ring of the voice.

He spoke earnestly.

" You honour me by caring for my opinion. The past is buried. I have some forgiveness to ask. Much, when I think of it—very much. I

did you a public wrong. From a man to a woman it was unpardonable. It is a blot on my career. I beg you humbly to believe that I repent it."

The sun was flaming with great wings red among the vapours; and in the recollection of the two, as they rode onward facing it, arose that day of the forlorn charge of English horse in the Indian jungle, the thunder and the dust, the fire and the dense knot of the struggle. And like a ghost sweeping across her eyeballs, Mrs. Lovell beheld, part in his English freshness, part ensanguined, the image of the gallant boy who had ridden to perish at the spur of her mad whim. She forgot all present surroundings.

"Percy!" she said.

"Madam?"

"Percy!"

"Margaret?"

"Oh, what an undying day, Percy!"

And then she was speechless.

CHAPTER IX.

CONTAINS A STUDY OF A FOOL IN TROUBLE.

THE Park had been empty, but the opera-house was full ; and in the brilliance of the lights and divine soaring of the music, the genius of champagne luncheons discussed the fate of the horse Templemore ; some, as a matter of remote history ; some, as another delusion in horse-flesh ; the greater number, however, with a determination to stand by the beaten favourite, though he had fallen, and proclaim him the best of racers and an animal foully mishandled on the course. There were whispers, and hints, and assertions ; now implicating the jockey, now the owner of Templemore. The Manchester party, and the Yorkshire party, and their diverse villainous tricks, came under review. Several offered to back Templemore at double the money they had lost, against

the winner. A favourite on whom money has been staked, not only has friends, but in adversity he is still believed in ; nor could it well be otherwise, for the money, no doubt, stands for faith, or it would never have been put up to the risks of a forfeit.

Foremost and wildest among the excited young men who animated the stalls, and rushed about the lobby, was Algernon. He was the genius of champagne luncheon incarnate. On him devolves, for a time, the movement of this story, and we shall do well to contemplate him, though he may seem possibly to be worthless. What is worthless, if it be well looked at? Nay, the most worthless creature is most serviceable for examination, when the microscope is applied to them, as a simple study of human mechanism. This youth is one of great Nature's tom-fools : an elegant young gentleman outwardly, of the very large class who are simply the engines of their appetites, and, to the philosophic eye, still run wild in woods, as did the primitive nobleman that made a noise in the earlier world.

Algernon had this day lost ten times more

than he could hope to be in a position to pay within ten years, at the least, if his father continued to argue the matter against Providence, and live. He had lost, and might speedily expect to be posted in all good betting circles as something not pleasantly odoriferous for circles where there is no betting. Nevertheless, the youth was surcharged with gaiety. The soul of chicken and wine illumined his cheeks and eyes. He laughed and joked about the horse—his horse, as he called Templemore—and meeting Lord Suckling, won five sovereigns of him by betting that the colours of one of the beaten horses, Benloo, were distinguished by a chocolate bar. The bet was referred to a dignified umpire, who, a Frenchman, drew his right hand down an imperial tuft of hair dependent from his chin, and gave a decision in Algernon's favour. Lord Suckling paid the money on the spot, and Algernon pocketed it exulting. He had the idea that it was the first start in his making head against the flood. The next instant he could have pitched himself upon the floor and bellowed. For, a soul of chicken and wine, lightly elated, is

easily dashed ; and if he had but said to Lord Suckling that it might as well be deferred, the thing would have become a precedent, and his own debt might have been held back. He went on saying, as he rushed forward alone : “Never mind, Suckling. Oh, hang it ! put it in your pocket ;” and the imperative necessity for talking, and fancying what was adverse to fact, enabled him to feel for a time as if he had really acted according to the prompting of his wisdom. It amazed him to see people sitting and listening. The more he tried it, the more unendurable it became. Those sitters and loungers appeared like absurd petrifactions to him. If he abstained from activity for ever so short a term, he was tormented by a sense of emptiness ; and, as he said to himself, a man who has eaten a chicken, and part of a game-pie, and drank thereto champagne all day, until the popping of the corks has become as familiar as minute-guns, he can hardly be empty. It was peculiar. He stood, just for the sake of investigating the circumstance—it was so extraordinary. The music rose in a triumphant swell.

And now he was sure that he was not to be blamed for thinking this form of entertainment detestable. How could people pretend to like it? "Upon my honour!" he said aloud. The hypocritical nonsense of pretending to like opera-music disgusted him.

"Where is it, Alg?" a friend of his and Suckling's asked, with a languid laugh.

"Where's what?"

"Your honour."

"My honour? Do you doubt my honour?" Algernon stared defiantly at the inoffensive little fellow.

"Not in the slightest. Very sorry to, seeing that I have you down in my book."

"Beauchamp? Ah, yes," said Algernon, musically, and letting his under lip hang that he might restrain the impulse to bite it. "Fifty, or a hundred, is it? I lost my book on the Downs."

"Fifty; but wait till settling-day, my good fellow, and don't fiddle at your pockets as if I'd been touching you up for the money. Come and sup with me to-night."

Algernon muttered a queer reply in a good-tempered tone, and escaped from him.

He was sobered by that naming of settling-day. He could now listen to the music with attention, if not with satisfaction. As he did so, the head of drowned memory rose slowly up through the wine-bubbles in his brain, and he flung out a far thought for relief: "How, if I were to leave England with that dark girl, Rhoda, at Wrexby, marry her like a man, and live a wild, ramping life in the colonies?" A curtain closed on the prospect, but if memory was resolved that it would not be drowned, he had at any rate dosed it with something fresh to occupy its digestion.

His opera-glass had been scouring the house for a sight of Mrs. Lovell, and at last she appeared in Lord Elling's box.

"I can give you two minutes, Algy," she said, as he entered and found her opportunely alone. "We have lost, I hear. No interjection, pray. Let it be, *fors l'honneur*, with us. Come to me to-morrow. You have tossed trinkets into my lap. They were marks of esteem, my cousin.

Take them in the same light back from me. Turn them into money, and pay what is most pressing. Then go to Lord Suckling. He is a good boy, and won't distress you ; but you must speak openly to him and at once. Perhaps he will help you. I will do my best, though whether I can, I have yet to learn."

" Dear Mrs. Lovell !" Algernon burst out, and the corners of his mouth played nervously.

He liked her kindness, and he was wroth at the projected return of his gifts. A man's gifts are an exhibition of the royalty of his soul, and they are the last things which should be mentioned to him as matters to be blotted out when he is struggling against ruin. The lady had blunt insight, just then. She attributed his emotion to gratitude.

" The door may be opened at any minute," she warned him.

" It's not about myself," he said ; " it's you. I believe I tempted you to back the beastly horse. And he would have won—a fair race, and he would have won easy. He *was* winning. He passed the stand a head ahead. He *did*

win. It's a scandal to the turf. There's an end of racing in England. It's up. They've done for themselves to-day. There's a gang. It's in the hands of confederates."

"Think so, if it consoles you," said Mrs. Lovell; "don't mention your thoughts, that is all."

"I do think so. . Why should we submit to a robbery? It's a sold affair. That Frenchman, Baron Vistocq, says we can't lift our heads after it."

"He conducts himself with decency, I hope."

"Why, he's won!"

"Imitate him."

Mrs. Lovell scanned the stalls.

"Always imitate the behaviour of the winners when you lose," she resumed. "To speak of other things: I have had no letter of late from Edward. He should be anxious to return. I went this morning to see that unhappy girl. She consents."

"Poor creature," murmured Algernon; and added: "Everybody wants money."

"She decides wisely; for it is the best she

can do. She deserves pity, for she has been basely used."

"Poor old Ned didn't mean," Algernon began pleading on his cousin's behalf, when Mrs. Lovell's scornful eye checked the feeble attempt.

"I am a woman, and, in certain cases, I side with my sex."

"Wasn't it for you?"

"That he betrayed her? If that were so, I should be sitting in ashes."

Algernon's look plainly declared that he thought her a mystery.

The simplicity of his bewilderment made her smile.

"I think your colonies are the right place for you, Algy, if you can get an appointment; which must be managed by-and-by. Call on me tomorrow, as I said."

Algernon signified positively that he would not, and doggedly refused to explain why.

"Then I will call on you," said Mrs. Lovell.

He was going to say something angrily, when

Mrs. Lovell checked him : “ Hush ! she is singing.”

Algernon listened to the prima donna in loathing ; he had so much to inquire about, and so much to relate : such a desire to torment and be comforted !

Before he could utter a word further, the door opened, and Major Waring appeared, and he beheld Mrs. Lovell blush strangely. Soon after, Lord Elling came in, and spoke the ordinary sentence or two concerning the day’s topic—the horse Templemore. Algernon quitted the box. His ears were surcharged with sound entirely foreign to his emotions, and he strolled out of the house and off to his dingy chambers, now tenanted by himself alone, and there faced the sealed letters addressed to Edward, which had, by order, not been forwarded. No less than six were in Dahlia’s handwriting. He had imagination sufficient to conceive the lamentations they contained, and the reproach they were to his own subserviency in not sending them. He looked at the post-marks. The last one was dated two months back.

"How can she have cared a hang for Ned, if she's ready to go and marry a yokel, for the sake of a home and respectability?" he thought, rather in scorn; and, having established this contemptuous opinion of one of the sex, he felt justified in despising all. "Just like women! They —no! Peggy Lovell isn't. She's a trump card, and she's a coquette—can't help being one. It's in the blood. I never saw her look so confoundedly lovely as when that fellow came into the box. One up, one down. Ned's away, and it's this fellow's turn. Why the deuce does she always think I'm a boy? or else, she pretends to. But I must give my mind to business."

He drew forth the betting-book which his lively fancy had lost on the Downs. Prompted by an afterthought, he went to the letter-box, saying—

"Who knows? Wait till the day's ended before you curse your luck."

There was a foreign letter in it from Edward, addressed to him, and another addressed to "Mr. Blancuv," that he tore open and read with disgusted laughter. It was signed "N.

Sedgett.” Algernon read it twice over, for the enjoyment of his critical detection of the vile grammar, with many “Oh! by Joves!” and a concluding, “This is a curiosity!”

It was a countryman’s letter, ill-spelt, involved, and of a character to give Algernon a fine scholarly sense of superiority altogether novel. Everybody abused Algernon for his abuse of common Queen’s English in his epistles; but here was a letter in comparison with which his own were doctorial, and accordingly he fell upon it with an acrimonious rapture of pedantry known to dull wits that have by extraordinary hazard pounced on a duller.

“ You’re ‘willing to *forgeit* and *forgeive*,’ are you, you dog!” he exclaimed, half dancing. “ You’d forge anything, you rascal, if you could disguise your hand—*that*, I don’t doubt. You ‘expeck the thousand pound to be payed down the day of my marriage,’ do you, you impudent ruffian! ‘acording to agremint.’ What a mercenary vagabond this is!”

Algernon reflected a minute. The money was to pass through his hands. He compressed a

desire to dispute with Sedgett that latter point about the agreement, and opened Edward's letter.

It contained an order on a firm of attorneys to sell out so much Bank Stock and pay over one thousand pounds to Mr. A. Blancove.

The beautiful concision of style in this document gave Algernon a feeling of profound deference towards the law and its officers.

“Now, that’s the way to write!” he said.

CHAPTER X.

EDWARD'S LETTER.

ACCOMPANYING this pleasant, pregnant bit of paper, possessed of such admirable literary excellence, were the following flimsy lines from Edward's self, to Algernon incomprehensible.

As there is a man to be seen behind these lines in the dull, unconscious process of transformation from something very like a villain to something by a few degrees more estimable, we may as well look at the letter in full.

It begins with a neat display of consideration for the person addressed, common to letters that are dictated by overpowering egotism :—

“ DEAR ALGY,

“ I hope you are working and attending regularly to office business. Look to that and to

your health at present. Depend upon it, there is nothing like work. Fix your teeth in it. Work is medicine. A truism ! Truisms, whether they lie in the depths of thought, or on the surface, are at any rate the pearls of experience.

"I am coming home. Let me know the instant this affair is over. I can't tell why I wait here. I fall into lethargies. I write to no one but to you. Your supposition that I am one of the hangers-on of the coquette of her time, and that it is for *her* I am seeking to get free, is conceived with your usual discrimination. For Margaret Lovell ? Do you imagine that I desire to be all my life kicking the beam, weighed in capricious scales, appraised to the direct nicety, petulantly taken up, probed for my weakest point, and then flung into the grate like a child's toy ? That's the fate of the several asses who put on the long-eared Lovell-livery.

"All women are the same. Know one, know all. Aware of this, and too wise to let us study them successfully, Nature——pretty language this is for you, Algy ! I can do

nothing but write nonsense. I am sick of life. I feel choked. After a month, Paris is sweet biscuit.

"I have sent you the order for the money. If it were two, or twenty, thousand pounds, it would be the same to me.

"I swear to Heaven that my lowest cynical ideas of women, and the loathing with which their simply animal vagaries inspires a thoughtful man, are distanced and made to seem a benevolent criticism, by the actualities of my experience. I say that you cannot put faith in a woman. Even now, I do not—it's against reason—I do not believe that she—this Dahlia—means to go through with it. She is trying me. I have told her that she was my wife. Her self-respect—everything that keeps a woman's head up—must have induced her to think so. Why, she is not a fool! How can she mean to give herself to an ignorant country donkey? She does not: mark me. For her who is a really—I may say the most refined nature I have ever met, to affect this, and think of

deceiving me, does not do credit to her wits—and she is not without her share.

"I did once mean that she should be honourably allied to me. It's comforting that the act is not the wife of the intention, or I should now be yoked to a mere thing of the seasons and the hours—a creature whose 'No' to-day is the 'Yes' of to-morrow. Women of this cast are sure to end comfortably for themselves, they are so obedient to the whips of Providence.

"But I tell you candidly, Algy, I believe she's pushing me, that she may see how far I will let her go. I do not permit her to play at this game with me. The difficulty is in teaching women that we are not constituted as they are, and that we are wilfully earnest, while they, who never can be so save under compulsion, carry it on with us, expecting that at a certain crisis a curtain will drop, and we shall take a deep breath, join hands, and exclaim, 'What an exciting play!—weeping luxuriously. The actualities of life must be branded on their backs

—you can't get their brains to apprehend them.

“Poor things! they need pity. I am ready to confess I did not keep my promise to her. I am very sorry she has been ill. Of course, having no brains—nothing but sensations whereabouts to combat every new revolution of fortune, she can't but fall ill. But I think of her; and I wish to God I did not. She is going to enter her own sphere—though, mark me, it will turn out as I say, that, when it comes to the crisis, there will be shrieks and astonishment that the curtain doesn't fall and the whole resolve itself to what they call a dream—in our language, a farce.

“I am astonished that there should be no letters for me. I can understand her not writing at first; but apparently she cherishes rancour. It is not like her. I can't help thinking there must be one letter from her, and that you keep it back. I remember that I told you when I left England I desired to have no letter forwarded to me, but I have repeatedly asked you since if there was a letter, and it appears to me that you have

shuffled in your answer. I merely wish to know if there is a letter; because I am at present out in my study of her character. It seems monstrous that she should never have written! Don't you view it in that light? To be ready to break with me, without one good-by!—it's gratifying, but I am astonished; for so gentle and tender a creature, such as I knew her, never existed to compare with her. *Ce qui est bien la preuve qui je ne la connaissais pas!* I thought I did, which was my error. I have a fatal habit of trusting to my observation less than to my divining wit; and La Rochefoucauld is right: '*on est quelquefois un sot avec de l'esprit; mais on ne l'est jamais avec du jugement.*' Well! better be deceived in a character than doubt it.

"This will soon be over. Then back to the dear old dusky chambers, with the pick and the axe in the mine of law, till I strike a gold vein, and follow it to the woolsack. I want peace. I begin to hate pleading. I hope to meet Death full-wigged. By my troth, I will look as grimly at him as he at me. Meantime, during a vaca-

tion, I will give you holiday (or better, in the February days, if I can spare time and Equity is dispensed without my aid), dine you, and put you in the whirl of Paris. You deserve a holiday. *Nunc est bibendum!* You shall sing it. Tell me what you think of her behaviour. You are a judge of women. I think I am developing nerves. In fact, work is what I need—a file to bite. And send me also the name of this man who has made the bargain—who is to be her husband. Give me a description of him. It is my duty to see that he has principle; at least we're bound to investigate his character, if it's really to go on. I wonder whether you will ever perceive the comedy of life. I doubt whether a man is happier when he does perceive it. Perhaps the fact is, that he has by that time lost his power of laughter; except in the case of here and there a very tremendous philosopher.

“I believe that we comic creatures suffer more than your tragic personages. We, do you see, are always looking to be happy and comfortable; but in a tragedy, the doomed wretches are liver-

complexioned from the opening act. Their laughter is the owl: their broadest smile is twilight. All the menacing horrors of an eclipse are ours, for we have a sun over us; but they are born in shades, with the tuck of a curtain showing light, and little can be taken from them; so that they find scarce any terrors in the inevitable final stroke. No; the comedy is painfullest. You and I, Algy, old bachelors, will earn the right just to chuckle. We will take the point of view of science, be the stage carpenters, and let the actors move on and off. By this, we shall learn to take a certain pride in the machinery. To become stage carpenter, is to attain to the highest rank within the reach of intellectual man. But your own machinery must be sound, or you can't look after that of the theatre. Don't over-tax thy stomach, O youth!

“ And now, farewell, my worthy ass! You have been thinking me one through a fair half of this my letter, so I hasten to be in advance of you, by calling you one. You are one: I likewise am one. We are all one. The uni-

versal language is hee-haw, done in a grievous yawn.

"Yours,

EDWARD B.

"*P.S.*—Don't fail to send a letter by the next post; then, go and see her; write again *exactly* what she says, and let me know the *man's name*. You will *not lose a minute*. Also, don't waste ink in putting Mrs. Lovell's name to paper: I desire not to hear anything of the woman."

Algernon read this letter in a profound mystification, marvelling how it could possibly be that Edward and Mrs. Lovell had quarrelled once more, and without meeting.

They had parted, he knew or supposed that he knew, under an engagement to arrange the preliminaries of an alliance, when Edward should return from France; in other words, when Edward had thrown grave-dust on a naughty portion of his past; severing an unwise connection. Such had certainly been Edward's view of the matter. But Mrs. Lovell had never spoken to Algernon on that subject. She had spoken

willingly and in deep sympathy of Dahlia. She had visited her, pitied her, comforted her; and Algernon remembered that she had looked very keen and pinched about the mouth in alluding to Dahlia; but how she and Edward had managed to arrive at another misunderstanding was a prodigious puzzle to him; and why, if their engagement had snapped, each consented to let Dahlia's marriage (which was evidently distasteful to both) go on to the conclusion of the ceremony, he could not comprehend. There were, however, so many things in the world that he could not comprehend, and he had grown so accustomed, after an effort to master a difficulty, to lean his head back upon downy ignorance, that he treated this significant letter of Edward's like a tough lesson, and quietly put it by, together with every recommendation it contained. For all that was practical in it, it might just as well not have been written.

The value of the letter lies in the exhibition it presents of a rather markworthy young man, who has passed through the hands of a—(what I must call her; and in doing so, I ask pardon of all the Jack Cades of letters, who, in the

absence of a grammatical king and a government, sit as lords upon the English tongue) a crucible-woman. She may be inexcusable herself; but you—for you to be base, for you to be cowardly, even to betray a weakness, though it be on her behalf,—though you can plead that all you have done is for her, yea, was partly instigated by her,—it will cause her to dismiss you with the inexorable contempt of Nature, when she has tried one of her creatures and found him wanting.

Margaret Lovell was of this description: a woman fashioned to do both harm and good, and more of harm than of good; but never to sanction a scheme of evil or blink at it in alliance with another: a woman, in contact with whom you were soon resolved to your component elements. Separated from a certain fascination that there was for her in Edward's acerb wit, she saw that he was doing a dastardly thing in cold blood. We need not examine their correspondence. In a few weeks she had contrived to put a chasm between them as lovers. Had he remained in England, boldly facing his own evil actions, she would have been subjugated, for

however keenly she might pierce to the true character of a man, the show of an unflinching courage dominated her ; but his departure, leaving all the brutality to be done for him behind his back, filled this woman with a cutting spleen. It is sufficient for some men to know that they are seen through, in order to turn away in loathing from her whom they have desired ; and when they do thus turn away, they not uncommonly turn with a rush of old affection to those who have generously trusted them in the days past, and blindly thought them estimable beings.

Algernon was by no means gifted to perceive whether this was the case with his cousin in Paris.

CHAPTER XI.

FURTHERMORE OF THE FOOL.

So long as the fool has his being in the world, he will be a part of every history, nor can I keep him from his place in a narrative that is made to revolve more or less upon its own wheels. Algernon went to bed, completely forgetting Edward and his own misfortunes, under the influence of the opiate of the order for one thousand pounds, to be delivered to him upon application. The morning found him calmly cheerful, until a little parcel was brought to his door, together with a note from Mrs. Lovell, explaining that the parcel contained those jewels, his precious gifts of what she had insultingly chosen to call ‘esteem’ for her.

Algernon took it in his hand, and thought of flinging it through the window; but as the

window happened to be open, he checked the impulse, and sent it with great force into a corner of the room : a perfectly fool-like proceeding, for the fool is, after his fashion, prudent, and will never, if he can help it, do himself thorough damage, that he may learn by it and be wiser.

“I never stand insult,” he uttered, self-approvingly, and felt manlier. “No ; not even from you, ma’am,” he apostrophized Mrs. Lovell’s portrait, that had no rival now upon the wall, and that gave him a sharp fight for the preservation of his anger, so bewitching she was to see. Her not sending up word that she wished him to come to her rendered his battle easier.

“It looks rather like a break between us,” he said. “If so, you wont find me so obedient to your caprices, Mrs. Margaret L. ; though you are a pretty woman, and know it. Smile away. I prefer a staunch, true sort of a woman, after all. And the colonies it must be, I begin to suspect.” This set him conjuring before his eyes the image of Rhoda, until he cried, “I’ll be hanged if the girl doesn’t haunt me !” and considered the matter with some curiosity.

He was quickly away, and across the square of Lincoln's Inn Fields to the attorney's firm, where apparently his coming was expected, and he was told that the money would be placed in his hands on the following day. He then communicated with Edward, in the brief Cæsarian tongue of the telegraph : "*All right. Stay. Ceremony arranged.*" After which, he hailed a skimming cab, and pronouncing the word "Epsom," sank back in it, and felt in his breast-pocket for his cigar-case, without casting one glance of interest at the deep fit of cogitation the cabman had been thrown into by the suddenness of the order.

"Dash'd if it ain't the very thing I went and gone and dreamed last night," said the cabman, as he made his dispositions to commence the journey.

Certain boys advised him to whip away it as hard as he could, and he would come in the winner.

"Where shall I grub, sir?" the cabman asked through the little door above, to get some knowledge of the quality of his fare.

"Eat your 'grub' on the course," said Algernon.

“ Ne’er a hamper to take up nowheres, is there, sir ?”

“ Do you like the sight of one ?”

“ Well, it ain’t what I object to.”

“ Then go fast, my man, and you will soon see plenty.”

“ If you took to chaffin’ a bit later in the day, it ’d impart more confidence to my bosom,” said the cabman ; but this he said to that bosom alone.

“ Ain’t no particular colours you’d like me to wear, is there ? I’ll get a rosette, if you like, sir, and enter in triumph. Gives ye something to stand by. That’s always my remark, founded on observation.”

“ Go to the deuce ! Drive on,” Algernon sung out. “ Red, yellow, and green.”

“ Lobster, ale, and salad !” said the cabman, flicking his whip ; “ and good colours too. Ten-penny Nail’s the horse. He’s the colours I stick to.” And off he drove, envied of London urchins, as mortals would have envied a charioteer driving visibly towards Olympus.

Algernon crossed his arms, with the frown of one looking all inward.

At school this youth had hated sums. All arithmetical difficulties had confused and sickened him. But now he worked with indefatigable industry on an imaginary slate ; put his postulate, counted probabilities, allowed for chances, added, deducted, multiplied, and unknowingly performed algebraic feats, till his brows were stiff with frowning, and his brain craved for stimulant.

This necessity sent his hand to his purse, for the calling of the cab had not been a premeditated matter. He discovered therein some half-crowns and a sixpence, the latter of which he tossed in contempt at some boys who were cheering the vehicles on their gallant career.

There was something desperately amusing to him in the thought that he had not even money enough to pay the cabman, or provide for a repast. He rollicked in his present poverty. Yesterday, he had run down with a party of young guardsmen in a very royal manner ; and yesterday he had lost. To-day he journeyed to the course poorer than many of the beggars he would find there ; and by a natural deduction, to-day he was to win.

He whistled mad waltzes to the measure of the wheels. He believed that he had a star. He pitched his half-crowns to the turnpike-men, and sought to propitiate Fortune by displaying a signal indifference to small change ; in which method of courting her he was perfectly serious. He absolutely rejected coppers. They ‘crossed his luck.’ Nor can we say that he is not an authority on this point : the goddess certainly does not deal in coppers.

Anxious efforts at recollection perplexed him. He could not remember whether he had ‘turned his money’ on looking at the last new moon. When had he seen the last new moon, and where ? A cloud obscured it ; he had forgotten. He soothed himself by cursing superstition. Tenpenny Nail was to gain the day in spite of Fortune. Algernon said this, and entrenched his fluttering spirit behind common sense, but he found it a cold corner. The longing for champagne stimulant increased in fervour. Arithmetic languished.

As he was going up the hill, the wheels were still for a moment, and hearing “Tenpenny

Nail" shouted, he put forth his head, and asked what the cry was, concerning that horse.

"Gone lame," was the answer.

It hit the centre of his nerves, without reaching his comprehension, and all Englishmen being equal on Epsom Downs, his stare at the man who had spoken, and his sickly colour, exposed him to pungent remarks.

"Hulloa! here's another Ninepenny—a penny short!" and similar specimens of Epsom wit, encouraged by the winks and retorts of his driver, surrounded him; but it was empty clamour outside. A rage of emotions drowned every idea in his head, and when he got one clear from the mass, it took the form of a bitter sneer at Providence, for cutting off his last chance of reforming his conduct and becoming good. What would he not have accomplished, that was brilliant, and beautiful, and soothing, but for this dead set against his destiny!

It was clear that Providence cared 'not a rap,' whether he won or lost—was good or bad. One might just as well be a heathen; why not?

He jumped out of the cab (tearing his coat in the act—a minor evil, but ‘all of a piece,’ as he said), and made his way towards the Ring. The bee-swarm was thick as ever on the golden bough. Algernon heard no curses, and began to nourish hope again, as he advanced. He began to hope wildly that this rumour about the horse was a falsity, for there was no commotion, no one declaiming.

He pushed to enter the roaring circle, which the demand for an entrance-fee warned him was a privilege, and he stammered, and forgot the gentlemanly coolness commonly distinguishing him, under one of the acuter twinges of his veteran complaint of impecuniosity. And then the cabman made himself heard: a civil cabman, but without directions, and uncertain of his dinner and his pay, tolerably hot, also, from threading a crowd after a deaf gentleman. His half-injured look restored to Algernon his self-possession.

“Ah! there you are:—scurry away and fetch my purse out of the bottom of the cab. I’ve dropped it.”

On this errand, the confiding cabman retired. Holding to a gentleman's purse is even surer than holding to a gentleman.

While Algernon was working his forefinger in his waistcoat-pocket reflectively, a man at his elbow said, with a show of familiar deference—

"If it's any convenience to you, sir," and showed the rim of a gold piece 'twixt finger and thumb.

"All right," Algernon replied readily, and felt that he was known, but tried to keep his eyes from looking at the man's face; which was a vain effort. He took the money, nodded curtly, and passed in.

Once through the barrier, he had no time to be ashamed. He was in the atmosphere of challenges. He heard voices, and saw men whom not to challenge, or try a result with, was to acknowledge oneself mean, and to abandon the manliness of life. Algernon's betting-book was soon out and in operation. While thus engaged, he beheld faces passing and repassing that were the promise of luncheon and

a loan ; and so comfortable was the assurance thereof to him, that he laid the thought of it aside, quite in the background, and went on betting with an easy mind.

Small, senseless bets, they merely occupied him ; and winning them was really less satisfactory than losing, which, at all events, had the merit of adding to the bulk of his accusation against the ruling Powers unseen.

Algernon was too savage for betting when the great race was run. He refused both at taunts and cajoleries ; but Lord Suckling coming by, said “ Name your horse,” and, caught unawares, Algernon named “ Little John,” one of the ruck, at a hazard. Lord Suckling gave him fair odds, asking : “ In tens ?—fifties ?”

“ Silver,” shrugged Algernon, implacable towards Fortune, and the kindly young nobleman nodded, and made allowance for his ill-temper and want of spirit, knowing the stake he had had on the favourite.

“ Little John” startled the field by coming in first at a canter.

“ Men have committed suicide for less than

this," said Algernon within his lips, and a modest expression of submission to fate settled on his countenance. He stuck to the Ring till he was haggard with fatigue. His whole nature cried out for champagne, and now he burst away from that devilish circle, looking about for Lord Suckling and a hamper. Food and a frothing drink were all that he asked from Fortune. It seemed to him that the concourse on the Downs shifted in a restless way.

"What's doing, I wonder?" he thought aloud.

"Why, sir, the last race ain't generally fashionable," said his cabman, appearing from behind his shoulder. "Don't you happen to be peckish, sir?—'cause, luck or no luck, that's my case. I couldn't see your purse nowhere."

"Confound you! how you hang about me! What do you want?" Algernon cried; and answered his own question, by speeding the cabman to a booth with what money remained to him, and appointing a place of meeting for the

return. After which he glanced round furtively to make sure that he was not in view of the man who had lent him the sovereign. It became evident that the Downs were flowing back to London.

He hurried along the lines of carriages, all getting into motion. The ghastly conviction overtook him that he was left friendless, to starve. Wherever he turned, he saw strangers and empty hampers, bottles, straw, waste paper —the ruins of the feast: Fate's irony meantime besetting him with beggars, who swallowed his imprecations as the earnest of coming charity in such places.

At last, he was brought almost to sigh that he might see the man who had lent him the sovereign, and his wish was hardly formed, when Nicodemus Sedgett approached, waving a hat encircled by preposterous wooden figures, a trifle less lightly attired than the ladies of the ballet, and as bold in the matter of leg as the female fashion of the period.

Algernon eyed the lumpy-headed, heavy-browed rascal with what disgust he had left

in him, for one who came as an instrument of the Fates to help him to some poor refreshment. Sedgett informed him that he had never had such fun in his life.

"Just 'fore matrimony," he communicated in a dull whisper, "a fellow ought to see a bit o' the world, I says—don't you, sir? and this has been rare sport, that it has! Did ye find your purse, sir? Never mind 'bout that ther' pound. I'll lend you another, if ye like. How sh'll it be? Say the word."

Algernon was meditating, apparently on a remote subject. He nodded sharply.

"Yes. Call at my chambers to-morrow."

Another sovereign was transferred to him; but Sedgett would not be shaken off.

"I just wanted t' have a bit of a talk with you," he spoke low.

"Hang it! I haven't eaten all day," snapped the irritable young gentleman, fearful now of being seen in the rascal's company.

"You come along to the jolliest booth—I'll show it to you," said Sedgett, and lifted one leg in dancing attitude. "Come along, sir: the

jolliest booth I ever was in, dang me if it ain't ! Ale and music—them's my darlings !" the wretch vented his slang. " And I must have a talk with you. I'll stick to you. I'm social when I'm jolly, that I be : and I don't know a chap on these here downns. Here's the pint : Is all square ? Am I t' have the cash in cash counted down, I asks ? And is it to be before, or is it to be after, the ceremony ? There ! bang out ! say, yes or no."

Algernon sent him to perdition with infinite heartiness, but he was dry, dispirited, and weak, and he walked on, Sedgett accompanying him. He entered a booth, and partook of ale and ham, feeling that he was in the dregs of calamity. Though the ale did some service in reviving, it did not cheer him, and he had a fit of moral objection to Sedgett's discourse.

Sedgett took his bluntness as a matter to be endured for the honour of hob-anobbing with a gentleman. Several times he recurred to the theme which he wanted, as he said, to have a talk upon.

He related how he had courted the young

woman, ‘ bashful-like,’ and had been so ; for she was a splendid young woman ; not so handsome now, as she used to be when he had seen her in the winter : but her illness had pulled her down and made her humble : they had cut her hair during the fever, which had taken her pride clean out of her ; and when he had put the question to her on the evening of last Sunday, she had gone into a sort of faint, and he walked away with her affirmative locked up in his breast-pocket, and was resolved always to treat her well —which he swore to.

“ Married, and got the money, and the lease o’ my farm disposed of, I’m off to Australia and leave old England behind me, and thank ye, mother, thank ye ! and *we* shan’t meet again in a hurry. And what sort o’ song I’m to sing for ‘England is my nation,’ ain’t come across me yet. Australia’s such a precious big world ; but that’ll come easy in time. And there’ll I farm, and damn all you gentlemen, if you come anigh *me*.”

The eyes of the fellow were fierce as he uttered this ; they were rendered fierce by a peculiar

blackish flush that came on his brows and cheek bones ; otherwise, the yellow about the little brown dot in the centre of the eye-ball had not changed ; but the look was unmistakably savage, animal, and bad. He closed the lids on them, and gave a sort of churlish smile immediately afterwards.

“ Harmony’s the game. You act fair, I act fair. I’ve kept to the condition. She don’t know anything of my whereabouts—res’dence, I mean ; and thinks I met you in her room for the first time. That’s the truth, Mr. Blancove. And thinks me a sheepish chap, and I’m that, when I’m along wi’ her. She can’t make out how I come to call at her house and know her first. Gives up guessing, I suppose, for she’s quiet about it ; and I pitch her tales about Australia, and life out there. I’ve got her to smile, once or twice. She’ll turn her hand to making cheeses, never you fear. Only, this I say. I must have the money. It’s a thousand and a bargain. No thousand, and no wife for me. Not that I don’t stand by the agreement. I’m solid.”

Algernon had no power of encountering a human eye steadily, or he would have shown the man with a look how repulsive he was to a gentleman. His sensations grew remorseful, as if he were guilty of handing a victim to the wretch.

But the woman followed her own inclination, did she not? There was no compulsion: she accepted this man. And if she could do that, pity was wasted on her!

So thought he: and so the world would think of the poor, forlorn soul striving to expiate her fault, that her father and sister might be at peace, without shame.

Algernon signified to Sedgett that the agreement was fixed and irrevocable on his part.

Sedgett gulped some ale.

“Hands on it,” he said, and laid his huge hand open across the table.

This was too much.

“My word must satisfy you,” said Algernon, rising.

“So it shall. So it do,” returned Sedgett, rising with him. “Will you give it in writing?”

“I won’t.”

“That’s blunt. Will you come and have a look at a sparring-match in yond’ brown booth, sir?”

“I am going back to London.”

“London and the theayter—that’s the fun now, ain’t it !” Sedgett laughed.

Algernon discerned his cabman and the conveyance ready, and beckoned him.

“Perhaps, sir,” said Sedgett, “if I might make so bold—I don’t want to speak o’ them sovereigns—but I’ve got to get back too, and cash is run low. D’ye mind, sir? Are you kind-hearted ?”

A constitutional habit of servility to his creditor when present before him signalized Algernon. He detested the man, but his feebleness was seized by the latter question, and he fancied he might, on the road to London, convey to Sedgett’s mind that it would be well to split that thousand, as he had previously devised.

“Jump in,” he said.

When Sedgett was seated, Algernon would have been glad to walk the distance to London

to escape from the unwholesome proximity. He took the vacant place, in horror of it. The man had hitherto appeared respectful ; and in Dahlia's presence he had seemed a gentle big fellow with a reverent, affectionate heart. Sedgett rallied him.

" You've had bad luck—that's wrote on your hatband. Now, if you was a woman, I'd say, tak' and go and have a peroose o' your Bible. That's what my young woman does ; and by George ! it's just like medicine to her—that 'tis ! I've read out to her till I could ha' swallowed two quart o' beer at a gulp—I was that mortal thirsty. It don't somehow seem to improve men. It didn't do *me* no good. There was I, cursin' at the bother, down in my boots, like, and she with her hands in a knot, staring the fire out o' count'nance. They're weak, poor sort o' things."

The intolerable talk of the ruffian prompted Algernon to cry out, for relief :

" A scoundrel like you must be past any good to be got from reading his Bible."

Sedgett turned his dull brown eyes on him, the

thick and hateful flush of evil blood informing them with detestable malignity.

“Come ; you be civil, if you’re going to be my companion,” he said. “I don’t like bad words ; they don’t go down my wind-pipe. ‘Scoundrel’ s a name I’ve got a retort for, and if it hadn’t been you, and you a gentleman, you’d have had it spanking hot from the end o’ my fist. Perhaps you don’t know what sort of a arm I’ve got ? Just you feel that ther’ ‘muscle.’”

He doubled his arm, the knuckles of the fist towards Algernon’s face.

“Down with it, you dog !” cried Algernon, crushing his hat as he started up.

“It’ll come on your nose, if I downs with it, my lord,” said Sedgett. “You’ve what they Londoners calls ‘bonneted yourself.’”

He pulled Algernon by the coat-tail into his seat.

“Stop !” Algernon shouted to the cabman.

“Drive ahead !” roared Sedgett.

This signal of a dissension was heard along the main street of Epsom, and re-awakened the flagging hilarity of the road.

Algernon shrieked his commands ; Sedgett thundered his. They tussled, and each having inflicted an unpleasant squeeze on the other, they came apart by mutual consent, and exchanged half-length blows. Overhead, the cabman—not merely a cabman, but an individual—flicked the flanks of his horse, and cocked his eye and head in answer to gesticulations from shop-doors and pavement.

“ Let ‘em fight it out, I’m impartial,” he remarked ; and having lifted his little observing door, and given one glance, parrot-wise, below, he shut away the troubled prospect of those mortals, and drove along benignly.

Epsom permitted it ; but Ewell contained a sturdy citizen, who, smoking his pipe under his eaves, contemplative of passers-by, saw strife rushing on like a meteor. He raised the waxed end of his pipe, and with an authoritative motion of his head at the same time, pointed out the case to a man in a donkey-cart, who looked behind, saw pugnacity upon wheels, and manœuvred a docile and wonderfully pretty-stepping little

donkey in such a manner that the cabman was fain to pull up.

The combatants jumped into the road.

"That's right, gentlemen ; I don't want to spile sport," said the donkey's man. "O' course you ends your Epsom-day with spirit."

"There's sunset on their faces," said the cabman. "Would you try a by-lane, gentlemen?"

But now the donkey's man had inspected the figures of the antagonistic couple.

"Tain't fair play," he said to Sedgett. "You leave that gentleman alone, you, sir!"

The man with the pipe came up.

"No fighting," he observed. "We ain't going to have our roads disgraced. It shan't be said Englishmen don't know how to enjoy themselves without getting drunk and disorderly. You drop your fists."

The separation had to be accomplished by violence, for Algernon's blood was up.

A crowd was not long in collecting, which caused a stoppage of vehicles of every description.

A gentleman leaned from an open carriage to

look at the fray critically, and his companion stretching his neck to do likewise, “ Sedgett !” burst from his lips involuntarily.

The pair of original disputants (for there were many by this time) turned their heads simultaneously towards the carriage.

“ Will you come on ?” Sedgett roared, but whether to Algernon, or to one of the gentlemen, or one of the crowd, was indefinite. None responding, he shook with ox-like wrath, pushed among shoulders, and plunged back to his seat, making the cabman above bound and sway, and the cab-horse to start and antic.

Greatly to the amazement of the spectators, the manifest gentleman (by comparison) who had recently been at a pummelling-match with him, and bore the stains of it, hung his head, stepped on the cab, and suffered himself to be driven away.

“ Sort of a ‘ man-and-wife’ quarrel,” was the donkey’s man’s comment. “ There’s something as corks ’em up, and something uncorks ’em ; but what that something is, I ain’t, nor you ain’t, man enough to inform the company.”

He rubbed his little donkey's nose affectionately.

"Any gentleman open to a bet I don't overtake that ere Hansom within three mile o' Ewell?" he asked, as he took the rein.

But his little donkey's quality was famous in the neighbourhood.

"Come on, then," he said; "and show what you can do, without emulation, Master Tom."

Away the little donkey trotted.

CHAPTER XII.

THE EXPIATION.

THOSE two in the open carriage, one of whom had called out Sedgett's name, were Robert and Major Waring. When the cab had flown by, they fell back into their seats, and smoked ; the original stipulation for the day having been that no harassing matter should be spoken off till night-fall.

True to this, Robert tried to think hard on the scene of his recent enjoyment. Horses were to him what music is to a poet, and the glory of the races he had witnessed was still quick in heart, and partly counteracted his astonishment at the sight of his old village enemy in company with Algernon Blancove.

It was not astonishing at all to him that they

should have quarrelled and come to blows ; for he knew Sedgett well, and the imperative necessity for fighting him, if only to preserve a man's self-respect and the common division of peace, when once he had been allowed to get upon terms sufficiently close to assert his black nature ; but how had it come about ? How was it that a gentleman could consent to appear publicly with such a fellow ? He decided that it meant something, and something ominous—but what ? Whom could it affect ? Was Algernon Blancove such a poor creature that, feeling himself bound by certain dark dealings with Sedgett to keep him quiet, he permitted the bullying dog to hang to his coat-tail ? It seemed improbable that any young gentleman should be so weak, but it might be the case ; and "if so," thought Robert, "and I let him know I bear him no ill-will for setting Sedgett upon me, I may be doing him a service."

He remembered with pain Algernon's glance of savage humiliation upward, just before he turned to follow Sedgett into the cab ; and considered that he ought in kindness to see him and

make him comfortable by apologizing, as if he himself had no complaint to make.

He resolved to do it when the opportunity should come. Meantime, what on earth brought them together?

"How white the hedges are!" he said.

"There's a good deal of dust," Major Waring replied.

"I wasn't aware that cabs came to the races."

"They do, you see."

Robert perceived that Percy meant to fool him if he attempted a breach of the bond; but he longed so much for Percy's opinion of the strange alliance between Sedgett and Algernon Blancove, that at any cost he was compelled to say, "I can't get to the bottom of that."

"That squabble in the road?" said Percy.
"We shall see two or three more before we reach home."

"No. What's the meaning of a gentleman consorting with a blackguard?" Robert persisted.

"One or the other has discovered an assimilation, I suppose," Percy gave answer. "That's

an odd remark on returning from Epsom. Those who jump into the same pond generally come out the same colour."

Robert spoke low.

"Has it anything to do with the poor girl, do you think?"

"I told you I declined to think till we were home again. Confound it, man, have you no idea of a holiday?"

Robert puffed his tobacco-smoke.

"Let's talk of Mrs. Lovell," he said.

"That's not a holiday for me," Percy murmured; but Robert's mind was too preoccupied to observe the tone, and he asked:

"Is she to be trusted to keep her word faithfully this time?"

"Come," said Percy, "we haven't betted to-day. I'll bet you she will, if you like. Will you bet against it?"

"I won't. I can't nibble at anything. Betting's like drinking."

"But you can take a glass of wine. This sort of bet is much the same. However, don't; for you would lose."

"There," said Robert; I've heard of being angry with women for fickleness, changeableness, and all sorts of other things. She's a lady I couldn't understand being downright angry with, and here's the reason—it ain't a matter of reason at all—she fascinates me. I do, I declare, clean *forget* Rhoda; I forget the girl, if only I see Mrs. Lovell at a distance. How's that? I'm not a fool, with nonsensical fancies of any kind. I know what loving a woman is; and a man in my position might be ass enough to—all sorts of things. It isn't that; it's fascination. I'm afraid of her. If she talks to me, I feel something like having gulped a bottle of wine. Some women you have a respect for; some you like or you love; some you despise: with her, I just feel I'm intoxicated."

Major Waring eyed him steadily. He said, "I'll unriddle it, if I can, to your comprehension. She admires you for what you are, and she lets you see it; I dare say she's not unwilling that you should see it. She has a worship for bravery: it's a deadly passion with her."

Robert put up a protesting blush of modesty,

as became him. “Then why, if she does me the honour to think anything of me, does she turn against me?”

“Ah! now you go deeper. She is giving you what assistance she can, at present: be thankful, if you can be satisfied with her present doings. Perhaps I’ll answer that other question by-and-by. Now we enter London, and our day is over. How did you like it?”

Robert’s imagination rushed back to the downs.

“The race was glorious. I wish we could go at that pace in life; I should have a certainty of winning. How miserably dull the streets look; and the people creep along—they creep, and seem to like it. Horseback’s my element.”

They drove up to Robert’s lodgings, where, since the winter, he had been living austere and recklessly; exiled by his sensitiveness from his two homes, Warbeach and Wrexby; and seeking over London for Dahlia—a pensioner on his friend’s bounty; and therein had lain the degrading misery to a man of his composition. Often had he thought of enlisting again, and getting drafted to a foreign station. Nothing but the consciousness that he was subsisting on money

not his own would have kept him from his vice. As it was, he had lived through the months between winter and spring, like one threading his way through the tortuous lengths of a cavern ; never coming to the light, but coming upon absurd mishaps in his effort to reach it. His adventures in London partook somewhat of the character of those in Warbeach, minus the victim ; for whom two or three gentlemen in public thoroughfares had been taken. These misdemeanours, in the face of civil society, Robert made no mention of in his letters to Percy.

But there was light now, though at first it gave but a faint glimmer, in a lady's coloured envelope, lying on the sitting-room table. Robert opened it hurriedly, and read it ; seized Dahlia's address, with a brain on fire, and said :

“ It's signed ‘ Margaret Lovell.’ This time she calls me ‘ Dear Sir.’ ”

“ She could hardly do less,” Percy remarked.

“ I know : but there is a change in her. There's summer in her writing now. She has kept her word, Percy. She's the dearest lady in the world. I don't ask why she didn't help me before.”

"You acknowledge the policy of mild measures," said Major Waring.

"She's the dearest lady in the world," Robert repeated. He checked his enthusiasm. "Lord in Heaven ! what an evening I shall have."

The thought of his approaching interview with Dahlia kept him dumb.

As they were parting in the street, Major Waring said, "I will be here at twelve. Let me tell you this, Robert : she is going to be married ; say nothing to dissuade her ; it's the best she can do ; take a manly view of it. Good-by."

Robert was but slightly affected by the intelligence. His thoughts were on Dahlia as he had first seen her, when in her bloom, and the sister of his darling ; now miserable ; a thing trampled to earth ! With him, pity for a victim soon became lost in rage at the author of the wrong, and as he walked along he reflected contemptuously on his feeble efforts to avenge her at Warbeach. She lived in a poor row of cottages, striking off from one of the main south-western suburb roads, not very distant from his own lodgings, at which he marvelled, as at a cruel irony. He could not

discern the numbers, and had to turn up several of the dusky little strips of garden to read the numbers on the doors. A faint smell of lilac recalled the country and old days, and some church bells began ringing. The number of the house where he was to find Dahlia was seven. He was at the door of the house next to it, when he heard voices in the garden beside him.

A man said, "Then I have your answer?"

A woman said, "Yes; yes."

"You will not trust to my pledged honour?"

"Pardon me; not that. I will not live in disgrace."

"When I promise, on my soul, that the moment I am free I will set you right before the world?"

"Oh! pardon me."

"You will?"

"No; no! I cannot."

"You choose to give yourself to an obscure dog, who'll ill-treat you, and for whom you don't care a pin's-head; and why? that you may be fenced from gossip, and nothing more. I thought *you* were a woman above that kind of meanness.

And this is a common countryman. How will you endure that kind of life? You were made for elegance and happiness: you shall have it. I met you before your illness, when you would not listen to me: I met you after. I knew you at once. Am I changed? I swear to you I have dreamed of you ever since, and love you. Be as faded as you like; be hideous, if you like; but come with me. You know my name, and what I am. Twice I have followed you, and found your name and address; twice I have written to you, and made the same proposition. And you won't trust to my honour? When I tell you I love you tenderly? When I give you my solemn assurance that you shall not regret it? You have been deceived by one man: why punish me? I know—I feel you are innocent and good. This is the third time that you have permitted me to speak to you: let it be final. Say you will trust yourself to me—trust in my honour. Say it shall be to-morrow. Yes; say the word. To-morrow. My sweet creature—do!"

The man spoke earnestly, but a third person

and extraneous hearer could hardly avoid being struck by the bathetic conclusion. At least, in tone it bordered on a fall; but the woman did not feel it so.

She replied, " You mean kindly to me, sir. I thank you indeed, for I am very friendless. Oh ! pardon me : I am quite—quite determined. Go—pray, forget me."

This was Dahlia's voice.

Robert was unconscious of having previously suspected it. Heartily ashamed of letting his ears be filled with secret talk, he went from the garden and crossed the street.

He knew this to be one of the temptations of young women in London.

Shortly after, the man came through the iron gateway of the garden. He passed under lamp-light, and Robert perceived him to be a gentleman in garb.

A light appeared in the windows of the house. Now that he had heard her voice, the terrors of his interview were dispersed, and he had only plain sadness to encounter. He knocked at the door quietly. There was a long delay after he

had sent in his name ; but finally admission was given.

“ If I had loved her ! ” groaned Robert, before he looked on her ; but when he did look on her, affectionate pity washed the selfish man out of him. All these false sensations, peculiar to men, concerning the soiled purity of woman, the lost innocence, the brand of shame upon her, which are commonly the foul sentimentalism of such as can be too eager in the chase of corruption when occasion suits, and are another side of pruriency, not absolutely foreign to the best of us in our youth—all passed away from him in Dahlia’s presence.

The young man who can look on them we call fallen women with a noble eye, is to my mind he that is most nobly begotten of the race, and likeliest to be the sire of a noble line. Robert was less than he ; but Dahlia’s aspect helped him to his rightful manliness. He saw that her worth survived.

The creature’s soul had put no gloss upon her sin. She had sinned, and her suffering was manifest.

She had chosen to stand up and take the scourge of God; after which the stones cast by men are not painful.

By this, I mean that she had voluntarily stripped her spirit bare of evasion, and seen herself for what she was; pleading no excuse. His scourge is the Truth, and she had faced it.

Innumerable fanciful thoughts, few of them definite, beset the mind at interviews such as these; but Robert was distinctly impressed by her look. It was as that of one upon the yonder shore. Though they stood close together, he had the thought of their being separate—a gulf between.

The colourlessness of her features helped to it, and the odd little, close-fitting white linen cap which she wore to conceal the stubborn-twisting clipped curls of her shorn head, made her unlike women of our world. She was dressed in black up to the throat. Her eyes were still luminously blue, and she let them dwell on Robert one gentle instant, giving him her hand humbly.

“Dahlia!—my dear *sister*, I wish I could

say ; but the luck's against me," Robert began.

She sat, with her fingers locked together in her lap, gazing forward on the floor, her head a little sideways bent.

"I believe," he went on—"I haven't heard, but I believe Rhoda is well."

"She and father are well, I know," said Dahlia.

Robert started : "Are you in communication with them?"

She shook her head. "At the end of some days I shall see them."

"And then perhaps you'll plead my cause, and make me thankful to you for life, Dahlia?"

"Rhoda does not love you."

"That's the fact, if a young woman's to be trusted to know her own mind, in the first place, and to speak it, in the second."

Dahlia closed her lips. The long-lined underlip was no more very red. Her heart knew that it was not to speak of himself that he had come ; but she was poor-witted, through weakness of

her blood, and out of his own immediate line of thought could think neither far nor deep. He entertained her with talk of his notions of Rhoda, finishing :

" But at the end of a week you will see her, and I daresay she'll give you her notions of me. Dahlia ! how happy this 'll make them. I do say—thank God ! from my soul, for this."

She pressed her hands in her lap, trembling. " If you will, please, not speak of it, Mr. Robert."

" Say only you do mean it, Dahlia. You mean to let them see you ?"

She shivered out a " Yes."

" That's right. Because, a father and a sister—haven't they a claim ? Think awhile. They've had a terrible time. And it's true that you've consented to a husband, Dahlia ? I'm glad, if it is ; and he's good and kind. Right soul-glad I am."

While he was speaking, her eyelids lifted and her eyes became fixed on him in a stony light of terror, like a creature in anguish before her

executioner. Then again her eyelids dropped. She had not moved from her still posture.

" You love him ?" he asked, in some wonderment.

She gave no answer.

" Don't you care for him ?"

There was no reply.

" Because, Dahlia, if you do not—I know I have no right to fancy you do not. How is it? Tell me. Marriage is an awful thing, where there's no love. And this man, whoever he is—is he in good circumstances? I wouldn't speak of him; but, you see, I must, as your friend—and I'm that. Come: he loves you? Of course, he does. He has said so? I believe it. And he's a man you can honour and esteem? You wouldn't consent without, I'm sure. What makes me anxious—I look on you as my sister, whether Rhoda will have it so or not; I'm anxious because—I'm anxious it should be over, for then Rhoda will be proud of the faith she had in you, and it will lighten the old man's heart."

Once more the inexplicable frozen look struck

over him from her opened eyes, as if one of the minutes of Time had yawned to show him its deep, mute, tragic abyss, and was extinguished.

“When does it take place, Dahlia?”

Her long underlip, white almost as the row of teeth it revealed, hung loose.

“When?” he asked, leaning forward to hear, and the word was “Saturday,” uttered with a feeble harshness, not like the gentle voice of Dahlia.

“This coming Saturday?”

“No.”

“Saturday week?”

She fell into a visible trembling.

“You named the day?”

He pushed for an indication of cheerful consent to the act she was about to commit, or of reluctance.

Possibly she saw this, for now she answered, “I did.” The sound was deep in her throat.

“Saturday week,” said Robert. “I feel to the man as a brother, already. Do you live—you’ll live in the country?”

“Abroad.”

"Not in Old England? I'm sorry for that. But—well! Things must be as they're ordered. Heigho! *I've* got to learn it."

Dahlia smiled kindly.

"Rhoda will love you. She is firm when she loves."

"*When* she loves. Where's the consolation to me?"

"Do you think she loves me as much—as much ——"

"As much as ever? She loves her sister with all her heart—all, for I haven't a bit of it."

"It is because," Dahlia said slowly, "it is because she thinks I am ——"

Here the poor creature's bosom heaved piteously.

"What has she said of me? I wish her to have blamed me—it is less pain."

"Listen," said Robert. "She does not, and couldn't blame you, for it's a sort of religion with her to believe no wrong of you. And the reason why she hates me is, that I, knowing something more of the world, suspected, and

chose to let her know it—I said it, in fact—that you have been deceived by a——But this isn't the time to abuse others. She would have had me, if I had thought proper to think as she thinks, or play hypocrite, and pretend to. I'll tell you openly, Dahlia ; your father thinks the worst. Ah ! you look the ghost again. It's hard for you to hear, but you give me a notion of having got strength to hear it. It's your father's way to think the worst. Now, when you can show him your husband, my dear, he'll lift his head. He's old English. He won't dream of asking questions. He'll see a brave and honest young man who must love you, or—he does love you, that's settled. Your father'll shake his hand, and as for Rhoda, she'll triumph. The only person to speak out to, is the man who marries you, and that you've done.”

Robert looked the interrogation he did not utter.

“ I have,” said Dahlia.

“ Good : if I may call him brother, some day, all the better for me. Now, you won't leave England the day you're married.”

“ Soon. I pray that it may be soon.”

“ Yes ; well, on that morning, I’ll have your father and Rhoda at my lodgings, not wide from here : if I’d only known it earlier !—and you and your husband shall come there and join us. It’ll be a happy meeting at last.”

Dahlia stopped her breathing.

“ Will you see Rhoda ?”

“ I’ll go to her to-morrow, if you like.”

“ If I might see her, just as I am leaving England ! not before.”

“ That’s not generous,” said Robert.

“ Isn’t it ?” she asked like a child.

“ Fancy !—to see you she’s been longing for, and the ship that takes you off, perhaps everlastingly, as far as this world’s concerned !”

“ Mr. Robert, I do not wish to deceive my sister. Father need not be distressed. Rhoda shall know. I will not be guilty of falsehoods any more—no more ! Will you go to her ? Tell her—tell Rhoda what I am. Say I have been ill. It will save her from a great shock.”

She covered her eyes.

"I said in all my letters that my husband was a gentleman."

It was her first openly penitential utterance in his presence, and her cheeks were faintly reddened. It may have been this motion of her blood which aroused the sunken humanity within her; her heart leaped, and she cried :

"I can see her as I am, I can. I thought it impossible. Oh ! I can. Will she come to me ? My sister is a Christian and forgives. Oh ! let me see her. And go to her, dear Mr. Robert, and ask her—tell her all, and ask her if I may be spared, and may work at something—anything, for my livelihood near my sister. It is difficult for women to earn money, but I think I can. I have done so since my illness. I have been in the hospital with brain fever. *He* was lodging in the house with me before. He found me at the hospital. When I came out, he walked with me to support me : I was very weak. He read to me, and then asked me to marry him. He asked again. I lay in bed one night, and with my eyes open, I saw the dangers of women, and the trouble of my father and

sister ; and pits of wickedness. I saw like places full of snakes. I had such a yearning for protection. I gave him my word I would be his wife, if he was not ashamed of a wife like me. I wished to look once in father's face. I had fancied that Rhoda would spurn me, when she discovered my falsehood. She—sweet dear ! would she ever ? Go to her. Say, I do not love any man. I am heart-dead. I have no heart except for her. I cannot love a husband. He is good, and it is kind : but, oh ! let me be spared. His face !—”

She pressed her hands tight into the hollow of her eyes.

“ No ; it can't be meant. Am I very ungrateful ? This does not seem to be what God orders. Only if this must be ! only if it must be ! If my sister cannot look on me without ! He is good, and it is unselfish to take a moneyless, disgraced creature : but, my misery !—If my sister will see me, without my doing this !—Go to her, Mr. Robert. Say, Dahlia was false, and repents, and has worked with her needle to subsist, and can, and will, for her soul strives to

be clean. Try to make her understand. If Rhoda could love you, she would know. She is locked up—she is only ideas. My sweet is so proud. I love her for her pride, if she will only let me creep to her feet, kiss her feet. Dear Mr. Robert, help me! help me! I will do anything she says. If she says I am to marry him, I will. Don't mind my tears—they mean nothing now. Tell my dear, I will obey her. I will not be false any more to her. I wish to be quite stripped. And Rhoda may know me and forgive me, if she can. And—Oh! if she thinks, for father's sake, I ought, I will submit and speak the words ; I will ; I am ready. I pray for mercy."

Robert sat with his fist at his temples, in a frowning meditation.

Had she declared her reluctance to take the step, in the first moments of their interview, he might have been ready to support her : but a project fairly launched becomes a reality in the brain—a thing once spoken of attracts like a living creature, and does not die voluntarily. Robert now beheld all that was in its favour, and

saw nothing but flighty, flimsy objections to it. He was hardly moved by her unexpected outburst.

Besides, there was his own position in the case. Rhoda would smile on him, if he brought Dahlia to her, and brought her happy in the world's eye. It will act as a sort of signal for general happiness. But if he had to go and explain matters base and mournful to her, there would be no smile on her face, and not much gratitude in her breast. There would be none for a time, certainly. Proximity to her faded sister made him conceive her attainable, and thrice precious by contrast.

He fixed his gaze on Dahlia, and the perfect refinement of her simplicity caused him to think that she might be aware of an inappropriateness in the contemplated union.

“Is he a clumsy fellow? I mean, do you read straight off that he has no pretension to any manners of a gentleman—nothing near it?”

To this question, put with hesitation by Robert, Dahlia made answer, “I respect him.”

She would not strengthen her prayer by drawing the man's portrait. Speedily she forgot how

the doing so would in any way have strengthened her prayer. The excitement had left her brain dull. She did little more than stare mildly, and absently bend her head, while Robert said that he would go to Rhoda on the morrow, and speak seriously with her.

“But I think I can reckon her ideas will side with mine, that it is to your interest, my dear, to make your feelings come round warm to a man you can respect, and who offers you a clear path,” he said.

Whereat Dahlia quietly blinked her eyes.

When he stood up, she rose likewise.

“Am I to take a kiss to Rhoda?” he said, and seeing her answer, bent his forehead, to which she put her lips.

“And now I must think all night long about the method of transferring it. Good-by, Dahlia. You shall hear from your sister the morning after to-morrow. Good-by !”

He pressed her hand, and went to the door.

“There’s nothing I can do for you, Dahlia ?”

“Not anything.”

“God bless you, my dear !”

Robert breathed with the pleasant sense of breathing, when he was again in the street. Amazement, that what he had dreaded so much should be so easily over, set him thinking, in his fashion, on the marvels of life, and the naturalness in the aspect of all earthly things when you look at them with your eyes.

But in the depths of his heart there was disquiet. "It's the best she can do ; she can do no better," he said ; and said it more frequently than is needed by a mind established in the conviction. Gradually he began to feel that certain things seen with the eyes, natural as they may then appear and little terrible, leave distinct, solid, and grave impressions. Something of what our human tragedy may show before high Heaven possessed him. He saw it bare of any sentiment, in the person of the girl Dahlia. He could neither put a halo of imagination about her, nor could he conceive one degraded thought of the creature. She stood a naked sorrow, haunting his brain.

And still he continued saying, "It's the best she can do ; it's best for all. She can do nothing better."

He said it, unaware that he said it in self-defence.

The pale, nun-like ghostly face hung before him, stronger in outline the farther time widened between him and that suffering flesh.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MELTING OF THE THOUSAND.

THE thousand pounds were in Algernon's hands at last. He had made his escape from Boyne's Bank early in the afternoon, that he might obtain the cheque and feel the money in his pocket before that day's sun was extinguished. There was a note for five hundred; four notes for a hundred severally; and two fifties. And all had come to him through the mere writing down of his name as a recipient of the sum !

It was enough to make one in love with civilization. Money, when it is once in your pocket, seems to have come there easily, even if you have worked for it; but if you have done no labour whatever, and still find it there, your sensations (supposing you to be a butterfly youth—the typi-

cal child of a wealthy country) exult marvellously, and soar above the conditions of earth.

He knew the very features of the notes. That gallant old Five Hundred, who might have been a Thousand, but that he had nobly split himself into centurions and skirmishers, stood in his imaginative contemplation like a grand white-headed warrior, clean from the slaughter and in court-ruffles—say Blucher at the court of the Waterloo Regent. The Hundreds were his generals; the Fifties his captains; and each one was possessed of unlimited power of splitting himself into serviceable regiments, at the call of his lord, Algernon.

He scarcely liked to make the secret confession that it was the largest sum he had ever as yet carried about; but, as it heightened his pleasure, he did confess it for half an instant. Five Hundred in the bulk he had never attained to. He felt it as a fortification against every mishap in life.

To a young man commonly in difficulties with regard to the paying of his cabman, and latterly the getting of his dinner, the sense of elevation imparted by the sum was intoxicating. But,

thinking too much of the Five Hundred waxed dangerous for the fifties ; it dwarfed them to such insignificance that it made them lose their self-respect. So, Algernon, pursuing excellent tactics, set his mind upon some stray shillings that he had—a remainder of five pounds borrowed from old Anthony, when he endeavoured to obtain repayment of the one pound and interest, dating from the night at the theatre. Algernon had stopped his mouth on that point, as well as concerning his acquaintance with Dahlia, by immediately attempting to borrow further, whenever Anthony led the way for a word in private. A one-pound creditor had no particular terrors for him, and he manœuvred the old man neatly, saying, as previously, “Really, I don’t know the young person you allude to : I happened to meet her, or some one like her, casually,” and dropping his voice, “I’m rather short—what do you think ? Could you ?—a trifling accommodation ?” from which Anthony fled.

But on the day closing the Epsom week he beckoned Anthony secretly to follow him out of the office, and volunteered to give news that he had just heard of Dahlia.

"Oh," said Anthony, "I've seen her."

"I haven't," said Algernon, "upon my honour."

"Yes, I've seen her, sir, and sorry to hear her husband's fallen a bit low." Anthony touched his pocket. "What they calls 'nip' tides, ain't it?"

Anthony sprung a compliment under him, which sent the vain old fellow up, whether he would or not, to the effect that Anthony's tides were not subject to lunar influence.

"Now, Mr. Blancove, you must change them notions o' me. I don't say I shouldn't bericher if I'd got what's owing to me."

"You'd have to be protected; you'd be Bullion on two legs," said Anthony, always shrewd in detecting a weakness. "You'd have to go about with sentries on each side, and sleep in an iron safe!"

The end of the interview was a visit to the public-house, and the transferring of another legal instrument from Algernon to Anthony. The latter departed moaning over his five pounds ten shillings in paper; the former re-

joicing at his five pounds in gold. That day was Saturday. On Monday, only a few shillings of the five pounds remained; but they were sufficient to command a cab, and, if modesty in dining was among the prescriptions for the day, a dinner. Algernon was driven to the West.

He remembered when he had plunged in the midst of the fashionable whirlpool, having felt reckless there formerly, but he had become remarkably sedate, when he stepped along the walks. A certain equipage, or horse, was to his taste, and once he would have said: "That's the thing for me;" being penniless. Now, on the contrary, he reckoned the possible cost, grudgingly, saying "Eh?" to himself, and responding, "No," faintly, and then more positively, "Won't do."

He was by no means acting as one on a footing of equality with the people he beholds. A man who is ready to wager a thousand pounds that no other man present has that amount in his pocket, can hardly feel unequal to his company.

Charming ladies on horseback cantered past.
“Let them go,” he thought. Yesterday, the sight of one would have set him dreaming on grand alliances. When you can afford to be a bachelor, the case is otherwise. Presently, who should ride by, but Mrs. Lovell! She was talking more earnestly than was becoming, to that easy-mannered, dark-eyed fellow; the man who had made him savage by entering the opera-box.

“Poor old Ned!” said Algernon; “I must put him on his guard.” But, even the lifting of a finger—a hint on paper—would bring Edward over from Paris, as he knew; and that was not in his scheme; so he only determined to write to his cousin.

A flood of evening gold lay over the western park.

“The glory of this place,” Algernon said to himself, “is, that you’re sure of meeting none but gentlemen here;” and he contrasted it with Epsom Downs.

A superstitious horror seized him when, casting his eyes ahead, he perceived Sedgett

among the tasteful groups—as discordant a figure as could well be seen, and clumsily aware of it, for he could neither step nor look like a man at ease. Algernon swung round and retraced his way; but Sedgett had long sight.

“I’d heard of London”—Algernon soon had the hated voice in his ears, “and I’ve bin up to London b’fore; I came here to have a wink at the fash’nables—hang me, if ever I see such a scrumptious lot. It’s worth a walk up and down for a hour or more. D’you come heer often, sir?”

“Eh? Who are you? Oh!” said Algernon, half mad with rage. “Excuse me;” and he walked faster.

“Fifty times over,” Sedgett responded, cheerfully. “I’d pace you for a match up and down this place if you liked. Ain’t the horses a spectacle? I’d rather be heer than there at they races. As for the ladies, I’ll tell you what: ladies or no ladies, give my young woman time for her hair to grow, and her colour to come, by George! if she wouldn’t shine

against e'er a one—smite me stone-blind, if she wouldn't! So she shall! Australia 'll see. I owe you my thanks for interdoocin' me, and never fear my not remembering."

Where there was a crowd, Algernon could elude his persecutor by threading his way rapidly ; but the open spaces condemned him to merciless exposure, and he flew before eyes that his imagination exaggerated to a stretch of supernatural astonishment. The tips of his fingers, the roots of his hair, pricked with vexation, and still, manœuvre as he might, Sedgett followed him.

" Call at my chambers," he said sternly.

" You're never at home, sir."

" Call to-morrow morning, at ten."

" And see a great big black door, and kick at it till my toe comes through my boot. Thank ye."

" I tell you, I wont have you annoying me in public ; once for all."

" Why, sir ; I thought we parted friends, last time. Didn't you shake my hand, now, didn't you shake my hand, sir? I ask you, whether you shook my hand, or whether

you didn't? A plain answer. We had a bit of a scrimmage, coming home. I admit we had; but shaking hands, means 'friends again we are.' I know you're a gentleman, and a man like me, shouldn't be so bold as fur to strike his betters. Only, don't you see, sir, Full-o'-Beer's a hasty chap, and up in a minute; and he's sorry for it after."

Algernon conceived a brilliant notion. Drawing five shillings from his pocket, he held them over to Sedgett, and told him to drive down to his chambers, and await his coming. Sedgett took the money; but it was five shillings lost. He made no exhibition of receiving orders, and it was impossible to address him imperiously without provoking observations of an animated kind from the elegant groups parading and sitting.

Young Harry Beauchamp caught Algernon's eye; never was youth more joyfully greeted. Harry spoke of the Friday's race, and the defection of the horse "Tenpenny Nail." A man passed with a nod and "How d'ye do?" for which lie received in reply a cool stare.

“ Who’s that ?” Algernon asked.

“ The son of a high dignitary,” said Harry.

“ You cut him.”

“ I *can* do the thing, you see, when it’s a public duty.”

“ What’s the matter with him ?”

“ Merely a black-leg, a *grec*, a cheat, swindler, or whatever name you like,” said Harry. “ We none of us nod to the professionals in this line ; and I won’t exchange salutes with an amateur. I’m peculiar. He chose to be absent on the *right day* last year ; so from that date, I consider him absent *in toto* ; ‘none’ of your *rrrrrr—m* reckonings, let’s have the *rrrrrr—m toto* ;—you remember Suckling’s story of the Yankee fellow ? By-by ; shall see you the day after to-morrow. You dine with me and Suckling at the club.”

Harry Beauchamp was hailed by other friends. Algernon was forced to let him go. He dipped under the iron rail, and crossed the row at a run ; an indecorous proceeding ; he could not help it. The hope was that Sedgett would not have the like audacity, or might be stopped, and

Algernon's reward for so just a calculation was, that on looking round, he found himself free. He slipped with all haste out of the Park. Sedgett's presence had the deadening power of the torpedo on the thousand pounds.

For the last quarter of an hour, Algernon had not felt a motion of it. A cab, to make his escape certain, was suggested to his mind ; and he would have called a cab, had not the novel apparition of economy, which now haunted him, suggested that he had recently tossed five shillings into the gutter. A man might dine on four shillings and sixpence, enjoying a modest half pint of wine, and he possessed that sum. To pinch himself and deserve well of Providence, he resolved not to drink wine, but beer, that day. He named the beverage ;—a pint-bottle of ale ; and laughed, as a royal economist may, who punishes himself to please himself.

“ Mighty jolly, ain’t it, sir ?” said Sedgett, at his elbow.

Algernon faced about, and swore an oath from his boots upward ; so vehement was his disgust, and all-pervading his amazement.

"I'll wallop you at that game," said Sedgett.

"You infernal scoundrel!"

"If you begin swearing," Sedgett warned him.

"What do you want with me?"

"I'll tell you, sir. I don't want to go to ne'er a cock-fight, nor betting-hole."

"Here, come up this street," said Algernon, leading the way into a dusky defile from a main parade of fashion. "Now, what's your business, confound you!"

"Well, sir, I ain't goin' to be confounded : that, I'll—I'll swear to. The long and the short is, I must have some money 'fore the week's out."

"You won't have a penuy from me."

"That's blunt, though it ain't in my pocket," said Sedgett, grinning. "I say, sir, respectful as you like, I *must*. I've got to pay for passengerin' over the sea, self and wife ; and quick it must be. There's things to buy on both sides. A small advance and you won't be bothered. Say, fifty. Fifty, and you don't see me till Saturday, when, accordin' to agreement, you hand to me the cash, outside the church

door ; and then we parts to meet no more. Oh ! let us be joyful—I'll sing."

Algernon's loathing of the coarseness and profanity of villainy increased almost to the depth of a sentiment as he listened to Sedgett.

" I do nothing of the sort," he said. " You shall not have a farthing. Be off. If you follow me, I give you into custody of a policeman."

" You durstn't." Sedgett eyed him warily.

He could spy a physical weakness, by affinity of cowardice, as quickly as Algernon a moral weakness, by the same sort of relationship to it.

" You don't dare," Sedgett pursued. " And why should you, sir ? there's ne'er a reason why. I'm civil. I asks for my own : no more'n my own, it ain't. I call the bargain good : why sh'd I want fur to break it ? I want the money bad. I'm sick o' this country. I'd like to be off in the first ship that sails. Can't you let me have ten till to-morrow ? then t'other forty. I've got a mortal need for it, that I have. Come, it's no use your walking at that rate ; my legs are 's good as yours."

Algernon had turned back to the great tho-

roughfare. He was afraid that ten pounds must be forfeited to this worrying demon in the flesh, and sought the countenance of his well-dressed fellows to encourage him in resisting. He could think of no subterfuge ; menace was clearly useless : and yet the idea of changing one of the notes, and for so infamous a creature, caused pangs that helped him further to endure his dog-ging feet and filthy tongue. This continued until he saw a woman's hand waving from a cab. Presuming that such a signal, objectionable as it was, must be addressed to himself, he considered whether he should lift his hat, or simply smile as a favoured, but not too deeply flattered, man. The cab drew up, and the woman said, "Sedgett." She was a well-looking woman, strongly coloured, brown eyed, and hearty in appearance.

" What a brute you are, Sedgett, not to be at home when you brought me up to London with all the boxes and bedding—my goodness ! It's a Providence I caught you in my eye, or I should have been driving down to the docks, and seeing about the ship. You *are* a brute. Come in, at once."

"If you're up to calling names, I've got one or two for you," Sedgett growled.

Algernon had heard enough. Sure that he had left Sedgett in hands not likely to relinquish him, he passed on with elastic step. Wine was greatly desired, after his torments. Where was credit to be had? True, he looked contemptuously on the blooming land of credit now, but an entry to it by one of the back doors would have been convenient, so that he might be nourished and restored by a benevolent dinner, while he kept his thousand intact. However, he dismissed the contemplation of credit, and its transient charms. "I won't dine at all," he said.

A beggar woman stretched out her hand—he dropped a shilling in it.

"Hang me, if I shall be able to," was his next reflection; and with the remaining three and six-pence, he crossed the threshold of a tobacconist's shop and bought cigars, to save himself from excesses in charity. After gravely reproaching the tobacconist for the growing costliness of cigars, he came into the air, feeling extraordinarily empty. Of this, he soon understood the

cause, and it amused him. Accustomed to the smell of tobacco always when he came from his dinner, it seemed, as the fumes of the shop took his nostril, that demands were being made within him by an inquisitive spirit, and dissatisfaction expressed at the vacancy there.

"What's the use? I *can't* dine," he uttered argumentatively. "I'm not going to change a note, and I *won't* dine. I've no club. There's not a fellow I can see who'll ask me to dine. I'll lounge along home. There is some sherry there."

But Algernon bore vividly in mind that he did not approve of that sherry.

"I've heard of fellows frying sausages at home, and living on something like two shillings a day," he remarked in meditation; and then it struck him that Mrs. Lovell's parcel of returned jewels lay in one of his drawers at home—that is, if the laundress had left the parcel untouched.

In an agony of alarm, he called a cab, and drove hotly to the Temple. Finding the packet safe, he put a couple of rings and the necklace with the opal in his waistcoat pocket. The cab-

man must be paid, of course ; so a jewel must be pawned. Which shall it be ?—diamond or opal ? Change a dozen times and let it be the trinket in the right hand—the opal ; let it be the opal. How much would the opal fetch ? The pawnbroker can best inform us upon that point. So he drove to the pawnbroker ; one whom he knew. The pawnbroker offered him five-and-twenty pounds on the security of the opal.

“ What on earth is it that people think disgraceful in your entering a pawnbroker’s-shop ? ” Algernon asked himself when, taking his ticket and the five and twenty pounds, he repelled the stare of a man behind a neighbouring partition.

“ There are not many of that sort in the kingdom,” he said to the pawnbroker, who was loftily fondling the unlucky opal.

“ Well—h’m ; perhaps there’s not ;” the pawnbroker was ready to admit it, now that the arrangement had been settled.

“ I shan’t be able to let you keep it long.”

“ As quick back as you like, sir.”

Algernon noticed as he turned away that the man behind the partition, who had more the

look of a dapper young shopman than of a needy petitioner for loans on securities, stretched over the counter to look at the opal ; and he certainly heard his name pronounced. It enraged him ; but policy counselled a quiet behaviour in this place, and no quarrelling with his pawnbroker. Besides, his whole nature cried out for dinner. He dined and had his wine ; as good, he ventured to assert, as any man could get for the money ; for he knew the hotels with the venerable cellars.

“ I should have made a first-rate courier to a millionaire,” he said, with scornful candour, but without abusing the disposition of things which had ordered his being a gentleman. Subsequently, from his having sat so long over his wine without moving a leg, he indulged in the belief that he had reflected profoundly ; out of which depths he started, very much like a man who has dozed, and felt a discomfort in his limbs and head.

“ I must forget myself,” he said. Nor was any grave mentor by, to assure him that his tragic state was the issue of an evil digestion of

his dinner and wine. "I must forget myself. I'm under some doom. I see it now. Nobody cares for me. I don't know what happiness is. I was born under a bad star. My fate's written." Following his youthful wisdom, this wounded hart dragged his slow limbs towards the halls of brandy and song.

One learns to have compassion for fools, by studying them; and the fool, though Nature is wise, is next door to Nature. He is naked in his simplicity; he can tell us much, and suggest more. My excuse for dwelling upon him is, that he holds the link of my story. Where fools are numerous, one of them must be prominent now and then in a veracious narration. There comes an hour when the veil drops on him, he not being always clean to the discreeter touch.

Algernon was late at the bank next day, and not cheerful, though he received his customary reprimand with submission. This day was after the pattern of the day preceding, except that he did not visit the park; the night likewise.

On Wednesday morning, he arose with the conviction that England was no place for him to

dwell in. What if Rhoda were to accompany him to one of the colonies? The idea had been gradually taking shape in his mind from the moment that he had possessed the Thousand. Could she not make butter and cheeses capitally, while he rode on horseback through space? She was a strong girl, a loyal girl, and would be a grateful wife.

"I'll marry her," he said; and hesitated. "Yes, I'll marry her." But it must be done immediately.

He resolved to run down to Wrexby, rejoice her with a declaration of love, astound her with a proposition of marriage, bewilder her little brain with hurrying adjectives, whisk her up to London, and in little more than a week be sailing on the high seas, new born ; nothing of civilization about him, save a few last very first-rate cigars which he projected to smoke on the poop of the vessel, and so dream of the world he left behind.

He went down to the Bank in better spirits, and there wrote off a straightforward demand of an interview, to Rhoda, hinting at the purpose of it. While at his work, he thought of Harry

Beauchamp and Lord Suckling, and the folly of his dining with men in his present position. Settling-day, it or yesterday might be, but a colonist is not supposed to know anything of those arrangements. One of his fellow-clerks reminded him of a loan he had contracted, and showed him his name written under obligatory initials. He paid it, ostentatiously drawing out one of his fifties. Up came another, with a similar strip of paper. " You don't want me to change this, do you ?" said Algernon ; and heard a tale of domestic needs and a grappling landlady. He groaned inwardly : " Odd that I must pay for his landlady being a vixen !" The note was changed ; the debt liquidated. On the door-step, as he was going to lunch, old Anthony waylaid him, and was almost noisily persistent in demanding his one pound three and his five pound ten. Algernon paid the sums, ready to believe that there was a suspicion abroad of his intention to become a colonist.

He employed the luncheon hour in a visit to a colonial shipping office, and nearly ran straight upon Sedgett at the office-door. The woman who

had hailed him from the cab, was in Sedgett's company, but Sedgett saw no one. His head hung and his sullen brows were drawn moodily. Algernon escaped from observation. His first inquiry at the office was as to the business of the preceding couple, and he was satisfied by hearing that Sedgett wanted berths for himself and wife.

"Who's the woman, I wonder!" Algernon thought, and forgot her.

He obtained some particular information, and returning to the bank, was called before his uncle, who curtly reckoned up his merits in a contemptuous rebuke, and confirmed him in his resolution to incur this sort of thing no longer. In consequence, he promised Sir William that he would amend his ways, and these were the first hopeful words that Sir William had ever heard from him.

Algernon's design was to dress, that evening, in the uniform of society, so that, in the event of his meeting Harry Beauchamp, he might assure him he was coming to his club, and had been compelled to dine elsewhere—with his uncle, or anybody. When he reached the door of his chamber, a man was standing there, who said :

“Mr. Algernon Blancove?”

“Yes,” Algernon prolonged an affirmative to diminish the confidence it might inspire, if possible.

“May I speak with you, sir?”

Algernon told him to follow in. The man was tall and large-featured, with an immense blank expression of face.

“I’ve come from Mr. Samuels, sir,” he said, deferentially.

Mr. Samuels was Algernon’s chief jeweller.

“Oh,” Algernon remarked. “Well, I don’t want anything; and let me say, I don’t approve of this touting for custom. I thought Mr. Samuels was above it.”

The man bowed. “My business is not that, sir. Ahem! I dare say you remember an opal you had from our house. It was set in a necklace.”

“All right; I remember it perfectly,” said Algernon; cool, but not of the collected colour.

“The cost of it was fifty-five pounds, sir.”

“Was it? Well, I’ve forgotten.”

“We find that it has been pawned for five-and-twenty.”

“A little less than half,” said Algernon. “Pawnbrokers are simply cheats.”

"They mayn't be worse than others," the man observed.

Algernon was exactly in the position where righteous anger is the proper weapon, if not the sole resource. He flushed, but was not sure of his opportunity for the explosion. The man read the flush.

"May I ask you, did *you* pawn it, sir? I'm obliged to ask the question."

"I?—I really don't—I don't choose to answer impudent questions. What do you mean by coming here?"

"I may as well be open with you, sir, to prevent misunderstandings. One of the young men was present when you pawned it. He saw the thing done."

"Suppose he did?"

"He would be a witness."

"Against me? I've dealt with Samuels for three—four years."

"Yes, sir; but you have never yet paid any account; and I believe I am right in saying that this opal is not the first thing coming from our

house that has been pledged—I can't say you did it on the other occasions."

" You had better not," rejoined Algernon.

He broke an unpleasant silence by asking, " What further?"

" My master has sent you his bill."

Algernon glanced at the prodigious figures.

" Five hun—!" he gasped, recoiling; and added, " Well, I can't pay it on the spot."

" Let me tell you, you're liable to proceedings you'd better avoid, sir, for the sake of your relatives."

" You dare to threaten to expose me to my relatives?" Algernon said, haughtily, and immediately perceived that indignation at this point was a clever stroke; for the man, while deprecating the idea of doing so, showed his more established belief in the possible virtue of such a threat.

" Not at all, sir; but you know that pledging things not paid for is illegal, and subject to penalties. No tradesman likes it; they can't allow it. I may as well let you know that Mr. Samuels——"

"There, stop!" cried Algernon, laughing, as he thought, heartily. "Mr. Samuels is a very tolerable Jew; but he doesn't seem to understand dealing with gentlemen. Pressure comes;" he waved his hand swimmingly; "one wants money, and gets it how one can. Mr. Samuels shall not go to bed thinking he has been defrauded. I will teach Mr. Samuels to think better of us Gentiles. Write me a receipt."

"For what amount, sir?" said the man, briskly.

"For the value of the opal—that is to say, for the value put upon it by Mr. Samuels. Con—! hang!—never mind. Write the receipt."

He cast a fluttering fifty and a fluttering five on the table, and pushed paper to the man for a receipt.

The man reflected, and refused to take them.

"I don't think, sir," he said, "that less than two-thirds of the bill will make Mr. Samuels easy. You see, this opal was in a necklace. It wasn't like a ring you might have taken off your finger. It's a lady's ornament; and soon after you obtain it from us, you make use of it by

turning it into cash. It's a case for a criminal prosecution, which, for the sake of your relatives, Mr. Samuels wouldn't willingly bring on. The criminal box is no place for you, sir; but Mr. Samuels must have his own. His mind is not easy. I shouldn't like, sir, to call a policeman."

"Hey!" shouted Algernon; "you'd have to get a warrant."

"It's out, sir."

Though inclined towards small villanies, he had not studied law, and judging from his own affrighted sensations, and the man's impassive face, Algernon supposed that warrants were as lightly granted as writs of summons.

He tightened his muscles. In his time he had talked glibly of Perdition; but this was hot experience. He and the man measured the force of their eyes. Algernon let his chest fall.

"Do you mean?" he murmured.

"Why, sir, it's no use doing things by halves. When a tradesman says he *must* have his money, he takes his precautions."

"Are you in Mr. Samuels' shop?"

"Not exactly, sir."

" You're a detective?"

" I have been in the service, sir."

" Ah ! now I understand." Algernon raised his head with a strain at haughtiness. " If Mr. Samuels had accompanied you, I would have discharged the debt. It's only fair that I should insist upon having a receipt from him personally, and for the whole amount."

With this, he drew forth his purse and displayed the notable Five hundred.

His glow of victory was short. The impassive man likewise had something to exhibit.

" I assure you, sir," he said, " Mr. Samuels does know how to deal with gentlemen. If you will do me the honour, sir, to run up with me to Mr. Samuels' shop?—Or, very well, sir; to save you that annoyance here is his receipt to the bill."

Algernon mechanically crumpled up his note.

" Samuels?" ejaculated the unhappy fellow. " Why, my mother dealt with Samuels. My aunt dealt with Samuels. All my family have dealt with him for years; and he talks of pro-

ceeding against me, because—upon my soul, it's too absurd! Sending a policeman, too! I'll tell you what—the exposure would damage Mister Samuels most materially. Of course, my father would have to settle the matter; but Mister—Mishter Samuels would not recover so easily. He'd be glad to refund the five hundred—what is it?—and twenty-five—why not, ‘and sixpence three farthings?’ I tell you, I shall let my father pay. Mr. Samuels had better serve me with a common writ. I tell you, I'm not going to denude myself of money altogether. I haven't examined the bill. Leave it here. You can tear off the receipt. Leave it here.”

The man indulged in a slight demonstration of dissent.

“No, sir, that won’t do.”

“Half the bill,” roared Algernon; “half the bill, I wouldn’t mind paying.”

“About two-thirds, sir, is what Mr. Samuels asked for, and he’ll stop, and go on as before.”

“He’ll stop and he’ll go on, will he? Mr.

Samuels is amazingly like one of his own watches," Algernon sneered vehemently. "Well," he pursued, in fancied security, "I'll pay two-thirds."

"Three hundred, sir."

"Ay, three hundred. Tell him to send a receipt for the three hundred, and he shall have it. As to my entering his shop again, that I shall have to think over."

"That's what gentlemen in Mr. Samuels' position have to run risk of, sir," said the man.

Algernon, more in astonishment than trepidation, observed him feeling at his breast-pocket. The action resulted in an exhibition of a second bill, with a legal receipt attached to it, for three hundred pounds.

"Mr. Samuels is anxious to accommodate you in every way, sir. It isn't the full sum he wants; it's a portion. He thought you might prefer to discharge a portion."

After this amazing exhibition of foresight on the part of the jeweller, there was no more fight in Algernon beyond a strenuous "Faugh!" of uttermost disgust.

He examined the bill and receipt in the man's hand with great apparent scrupulousness; not, in reality, seeing a clear syllable.

"Take it and change it," he threw his Five hundred down, but recovered it from the enemy's grasp; and with a "one, two, three," banged his hundreds on the table: for which he had the loathsome receipt handed to him.

"How," he asked, chokingly, "did Mr. Samuels know I could—I had money?"

"Why, sir, you see," the man, as one who throws off a mask, smiled cordially, after buttoning up the notes; "credit 'd soon give up the ghost, if it hadn't its own—'dodges,' as I may say. This is only a feeler on Mr. Samuels' part. He heard of his things going to pledge. Halloo! he sings out. And tradesmen *are* human, sir. Between us, I side with gentlemen, in most cases. Hows'ever, I'm, so to speak, in Mr. Samuels' pay. A young gentleman in debt, give him a good fright, out comes his money, if he's got any. Sending of a bill receipted's a good trying touch. It's a compliment to him to suppose he can pay. Mr. Samuels,

sir, wouldn't go issuing a] warrant : if he could, he wouldn't. You named a warrant ; *that* set me up to it. I shouldn't have dreamed of a gentleman supposing it otherwise. Didn't you notice me show a wall of a face ? I shouldn't ha' dared to have tried that on an old hand—begging your pardon ; I mean a real—a scoundrel. The regular ones must see *features* : we mustn't be too cunning with them, else they grow suspicious : they're keen as animals ; they are. Good afternoon to you, sir."

Algernon heard the door shut. He reeled into a chair, and muffling his head in his two arms on the table, sobbed desperately ; seeing himself very distinctly reflected in one of the many facets of folly. Daylight became undesirable to him. He went to bed.

A man who can, in such extremities of despair, go premeditatively to his pillow, obeys an animal instinct in pursuit of oblivion, that will befriend his nerves. Algernon awoke in deep darkness, with a delicious sensation of hunger. He jumped up. Six hundred and fifty pounds of the money remained intact ; and he was joyful. He struck

a light to look at his watch : the watch had stopped ;—that was a bad sign. He could not forget it. Why had his watch stopped ? A chilling thought as to whether predestination did not govern the world, allayed all tumult in his mind. He dressed carefully, and soon heard a great city bell, with horrid gulfs between the strokes, tell him that the hour was eleven towards midnight. "Not late," he said.

"Who'd have thought it ?" cried a voice on the landing of the stairs, as he went forth.

It was Sedgett.

Algernon had one inclination to strangle, and another to mollify the wretch.

"Why, sir, I've been lurking heer for your return from your larks. Never guessed you was in."

"It's no use," Algernon began.

"Ay ; but it is, though," said Sedgett, and forced his way into the room. "Now, just listen. I've got a young woman I want to pack out o' the country. I must do it, while I'm a—a bachelor boy. She must go, or we shall be having shindies. You saw how she caught me

out of a cab. She's sure to be in the place where she ain't wanted. She goes to America. I've got to pay her passage, and mine too. Here's the truth: she thinks I'm off with her. She knows I'm bankrup' at home. So I am. All the more reason for her thinking me her companion. I get her away by train to the vessel, and on board, and there I give her the slip.

"Ship's steaming away by this time t'morrow night. I've paid for her—and myself too, she thinks. Leave it to me. I'll manage all that neatly enough. But, heer's the truth: I'm stumped. I must, and I will have fifty; I don't want to utter ne'er a threat. I want the money, and if you don't give it, I break off; and you mind this, Mr. Blancove:—you don't come off s' easy, if I do break off, mind. I know all about your relations, and by ——! I'll let 'em know all about you. Why, you're as quiet heer, sir, as if you was miles away, in a wood cottage, and ne'er a dog near."

So Algernon was thinking; and without a light, save the gas-lamp in the square, moreover.

They wrangled for an hour. When Algernon went forth a second time, he was by fifty pounds poorer. He consoled himself by thinking that the money had only anticipated its destination as arranged, and it became a partial gratification to him to reflect that he had, at any rate, paid so much of the sum, according to his bond in assuming possession of it.

And what were to be his proceedings? They were so manifestly in the hands of fate, that he declined to be troubled on that head.

Next morning came the usual short, impatient scrawl on thin blue paper from Edward, scarce worthy of a passing thought. In a postscript, he asked: "Are there, on your oath, no letters for me? If there are, send them immediately—every one, bills as well. Don't fail. I must have them."

Algernon was at last persuaded to pack up Dahlia's letters, saying: "I suppose they can't do any harm now." The expense of the postage afflicted him; but "women always cost a dozen to our one," he remarked. On his way to the City, he had to decide whether he would go to the

Bank, or take the train leading to Wrexby. He chose the latter course, until, feeling that he was about to embark in a serious undertaking, he said to himself—"No! duty first;" and postponed the expedition for the day following.

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